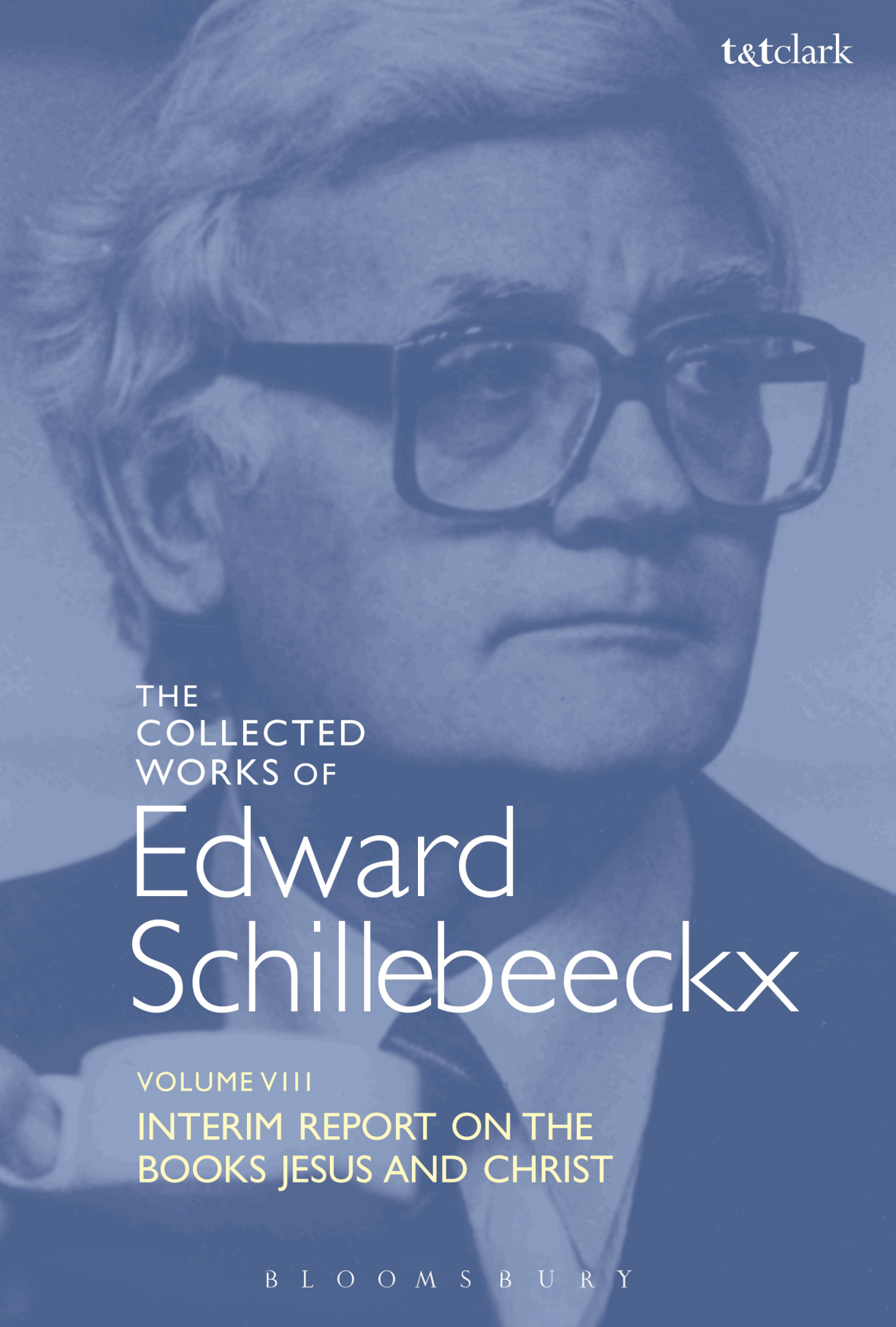

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THE COLLECTED WORKS OF

Edward Schillebeeckx

VOLUME VIII

INTERIM REPORT ON THE BOOKS JESUS AND CHRIST

BLOOMSBURY

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

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EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

VOLUME VIII

INTERIM REPORT ON THE BOOKS JESUS AND CHRIST

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Most secondary literature on *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ* refers to the 1980 edition. This edition offers a new translation in which typing errors, spelling mistakes and numerous wrong or poor translations are corrected. Therefore reference should be made to this version in the future, though it would be a service to your readers if the page numbers of the old edition (added in square brackets in the margins) are mentioned as well. The text of this new edition should be considered as authoritative.

Please note that endnotes in the original 1980 edition are converted to footnotes in this new edition.

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Introduction to

COLLECTED WORKS OF EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

Without a doubt Prof. Mag. Dr Edward Schillebeeckx O.P. (1914-2009) is one of the most creative and influential theologians of the 20th and 21st century. His work has been much discussed and is still widely popular in academic and pastoral circles. Schillebeeckx played a major role in theological and ecclesiastic renewal. His academic studies and scholarly pastoral books, sermons and lectures continue to inspire a wide reading public. His considerable authority as a scholar is based on extensive knowledge of the Christian tradition coupled with compassionate involvement with people and movements in church and society, especially those who are exposed to injustice and suffering.

A theologian of such exceptional stature in the Dutch language area certainly deserves enduring public attention. In 2004, therefore, on the occasion of Schillebeeckx's 90th birthday, the Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation made the first moves for the publication of his collected works. Extensive discussion followed on just what kind of publication we envisaged: a complete and comprehensive overview of his work, a critical edition of his monographs, an annotated reissue of his most innovative works and/or a selective republication of articles, including reflection on their reception. The preparatory committee − consisting of Dick Boer, Erik Borgman, Wil Derkse, Stephan van Erp, Mijke Jetten, Kristanto Budiprabowo, Frans Maas, Robert Schreiter, Ted Mark Schoof O.P., Nico Schreurs and Carl Sterkens – was soon confronted with a major problem: the sheer volume of Schillebeeckx's work. He was a very prolific writer indeed. This is borne out by the updated version of Schillebeeckx's bibliography, compiled and published by Ted Schoof and Jan van de Westelaken, which can be found on the foundation's website: www.schillebeeckx.nl. A publication of his complete works, therefore, seemed virtually impossible. Some of them had been published in one language only (mostly Dutch, but also German and French), while translations, though usually meticulously checked by or on behalf of the author, at times differed

somewhat from the original. Because of practical concerns like financial constraints and the limited availability of translations we confined ourselves to a re-publication of Schillebeeckx's major works – still a daunting endeavour.

For similar reasons we decided not to republish the original Dutch texts but only translations, although we realize that not even the best translation can adequately convey the often subtle nuances and delicate shades of meaning of the original. Various misunderstandings at Schillebeeckx's much publicized 'conversation' with Vatican authorities on Christology in 1980 illustrate this risk. It seemed logical to choose translations which would be accessible to the extensive Anglophone world. Fortunately quite a number of good translations of Schillebeeckx's publications were available. Nonetheless a great deal of the *Collected Works* were revised once more, both linguistically and substantively. The translations of volumes 1 to 5 did not require checking: that had already been done at the time of the publication of the English versions (between 1963 and 1974) by Schillebeeckx's fellow brother and assistant at the time, Ted Mark Schoof, who, before concluding his theological education with Edward Schillebeeckx in Nijmegen, had followed the regular theology course of four years at Blackfriars, Oxford. Of the volumes 6, 7 and 11 the as yet untranslated parts were either translated or edited by Marcelle Manley. This applies particularly to volume 11, most of which now appears in English for the first time, but also to a new section in volume 7 (*Christ. The Christian experience in the modern world*). As for volume 6 (*Jesus: An experiment in Christology*), the (somewhat laboured) original translation by Hubert Hoskins was edited by Sr Joanna Dunham, and subsequently thoroughly revised and re-edited by Marcelle Manley, in such depth that she should be mentioned as co-translator. The substantive accuracy of John Bowden's original translations of volumes 7 to 10 (and of volumes 6 and 11 as well) was checked by Ted Schoof. Hence they are now published as 'authorized' versions. Volume 9 (*The church with a human face*) required such extensive terminological corrections that the earlier translation can no longer be considered reliable. In each volume the section 'How to use this book' synoptically outlines a format for references to the text.

Although many linguistic and substantive changes were introduced, we did not opt for gender-inclusive language. Present-day translations would undoubtedly have used this style, but for the sake of maximum fidelity to the original text, and for the practical reason that the English versions of volumes 1 to 5 did not require checking, we decided not to do so.

These *Collected Works* include Schillebeeckx's unquestionably major theological works. We chose them for their historical significance, theological relevance and impact on developments in theology and church communities. It was no coincidence that these works were mostly out of print. In the *Collected Works* each volume will have a short introduction providing a brief sketch of

its background, context and relevance.

The Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation is proud to present Schillebeeckx's most influential works in one readily available series. We thank the Flemish and Dutch provinces of the Dominican Order for making this publication possible. We hope its readers' enjoyment of these works will be as great as our appreciation of the support we received.

Prof. Dr Nico Schreurs
Chairman, Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation

Introduction to the new edition

INTERIM REPORT ON THE BOOKS JESUS & CHRIST

In his *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*, Edward Schillebeeckx remarked on the pastoral concern that prompted him to write those volumes: 'A theologian can wish no more than to bring people, even believers in crisis, to the point of saying 'yes' to the heart of the gospel' (39). At the same time, Schillebeeckx's expressed intent in writing the *Interim Report* was to clarify the theological method and hermeneutical strategies that were at work in his christological project (see Chapter 4) as well as to respond to several major criticisms of the earlier volumes. Chapter Five addresses a number of those critiques including concerns about the primacy that Schillebeeckx gives to the christological title of 'eschatological prophet,' the charge that he undervalued an Easter christology and offered an overly subjective interpretation of the resurrection, and the failure of his first two books to articulate a fully systematic christology and to deal explictly with ecclesiology. Schillebeeckx's replies to each of those concerns as well as his discussion of his use of historical-critical exegesis and his endorsement of a historical approach to christology ('faith seeking *historical* understanding') in Chapter Two provided important clarifications (but not corrections, he noted) of his earlier writings.

The ongoing value of the *Interim Report* is found not only in those clarifications, however, but also in additional chapters which offer brief, but nuanced, syntheses of some of the most complex aspects of Schillebeeckx's thought – the relationship of revelation, tradition, and experience (Chapters 1 and 2), and the way in which Jesus is to be understood in relation to creation, salvation, and the kingdom of God (Chapters 6 and 7). For those who questioned whether Schillebeeckx's Jesus project offered an adequate contemporary interpretation of the doctrinal formulations of Nicea and Chaledon, the epilogue to this volume reminds readers that that was never his

intent, although he saw his work as in full continuity with those later doctrinal developments. Rather, his own project was an effort to seek an understanding of Christian faith at an earlier historical stage of its development; namely, to trace the faith journey of the first disciples which led to the first proclamations of explicit Christian faith (Vol. I, *Jesus*) and to attempt to identify the experience of salvation which lay behind the diverse expressions of salvation in the plural texts of the New Testament (Vol. II, *Christ*).

Christian Faith: A Tradition of Lived Experiences

In Chapters 2-4 of the *Interim Report* Schillebeeeckx identifies three basic hinges on which his (then) two-volume Jesus project turned: (1) revelation is located within, but not identical with, human experience; (2) all experience is interpreted; and (3) a living tradition of faith is possible only when the lived experience of faith of earlier believers is handed on as a message which seeks to offer the possibility of a new experience of faith to others in new contexts and times.

Each of those assertions prompted questions and criticisms which Schillebeeckx addresses in the present volume. Chapter Two underscores the theology of revelation and faith which undergirds the Jesus project. Throughout his two volumes he focused on the faith experience of the first disciples and earliest communities of faith which led to the critique that he reduced revelation to human experience, most problematically in his description of the encounter of the first disciples with the risen Christ as an experience of conversion, specficially an experience of forgiveness. In the *Interim Report* Schillebeeeckx argues that the experience of a changed direction in one's life (conversion) is never totally self-initiated, but rather results from encounters with others and ultimately with reality which resists our expectations. Although the presence of the divine at work in human history always exceeds the boundaries of human experience, that encounter can be perceived by human beings only if it is mediated through human experience. In religious terms, the faith of the disciples emerged from their encounter with Jesus, both during his lifetime and after his death.

Echoing his fuller treatment of this topic in the first part of the *Christ* volume and later in the introductory chapter to *Church. The Human Story of God*, Schillebeeckx argues that not only religious experience, but all human experience, occurs in a similar way: there is no uninterpreted experience. Human perception is necessarily framed by a prior history of experience, yet new events or encounters which contradict or exceed one's expectations break open and refashion previously limited horizons. Clarifying a disputed point in his earlier writing about whether all forms of interpretation are human and cultural creations that can be dispensed with in another time and culture, Schillebeeckx argues that there are two levels of interpretative elements in

human experience – primary elements which are an intrinsic dimension of what is actually experienced, and secondary interpretive elements which are mediated by one's cultural context. That distinction allows for both the element of unexpected gift (the givenness of the experience*d)* and the element of subjective interpretation which together comprise the experience of the offer of salvation.

Those hinges provide the grounds for Schillebeeckx's hermeneutical claims that although faith is always inculturated, not all elements of cultural symbolism, structures or language are intrinsic to the encounter with God. Some of those conceptual elements may need to be reinterpreted or even discarded in another time or culture if the Christian tradition is to remain a living tradition of faith. Hence, Schillebeeckx's approach to theology as a critical correlation (and at times even a 'critical confrontation') between the Christian tradition (which hands on earlier Christian experiences of faith in diverse cultural expressions) and present-day experiences (which may be either a new inculturation of Christian faith or a distortion of that tradition). The critical theological challenge is to distinguish between new moments in a living tradition and distortions of that authentic tradition. The mission entrusted to the church (comprised of diverse local communities of faith) is to hand on the good news of the experience of salvation in a way that enables others to embrace that same offer from within their own unique cultural and historical contexts.

Key Clarifications from the Jesus Project

A misunderstanding of those fundamental presuppositions at work in his earlier books was the source, in Schillebeeckx's judgment, of many of the mistaken readings of central aspects of his project. The criticism of his failure to provide a fully developed systematic christology or ecclesiology was itself a failure to understand that his goal was not to provide an interpretation of christological doctrines or a history of their development, but rather to seek historical understanding of the earliest emergence and diverse expressions of Christian faith.

Some critics had expressed concern about whether Schillebeeckx's emphasis on the centrality of the title of 'eschatological prophet' in the earliest development of Christian faith was reductive. Rather than suggesting that this title expressed the apostolic faith in its fullness, Schillebeeckx argued that the inter-testamental concept of a Mosaic-messianic eschatological prophet offers a plausible historical reconstruction of the earliest Christian interpretation of Jesus's life, words, and ministry as pointing beyond himself to the coming kingdom of God, an interpretation that he argued was rooted in Jesus' own pre-Easter self-understanding. That early interpretation of Jesus, in his view, served as the common matrix for further diverse credal models (Maranatha,

Wonder-Worker, Wisdom, and Easter christologies) all of which eventually came together in the canonical New Testament where the primary emphasis is on Easter christology. Highlighting both development and diversity in early Christian understandings of Jesus, Schillebeeckx clarifies an insight that remained implicit in his earlier books: 'Parousia christology is the mother of all Christianity: Jesus is 'the one who is to come'.'

Noting that the model of 'resurrection' was not the only way of expressing the 'Easter experience' of the disciples, Schillebeeckx is emphatic in his claim that the resurrection is not to be identified with the conversion experience or 'new life' of the disciples; rather there is an intrinsic connection between what happened to Jesus and the Easter faith of the disciples which is expressed in the biblical appearance narratives. To explain why his treatment of the resurrection focused on the Easter experience of the disciples, Schillebeeckx returns to his expressed goal of investigating the genesis of the faith of the disciples as well as to his epistemological claim that any event that is a disclosure of God in history is available to men only via the interpreted experience of faith.

Creation, Salvation, and the kingdom of God

Schillebeeckx's emphasis on the plural names for Jesus and plural expressions of the experience of salvation is intended not only to underline the rich diversity in Christian faith from its origins, but also to prompt contemporary communities of faith to search for new linguistic and practical expressions of 'salvation from God offered in Jesus' in diverse contemporary contexts. In service of that goal he argues that it is possible to identify four constant structures within the diverse New Testament explanations of the experience of salvation and basic dimensions of human life ('anthropological constants') – all of which need to be included in any account of salvation as including 'human flourishing' (Chapter Four).

In Chapters Six and Seven, he likewise underlines a number of important soteriological distinctions that many missed in the detailed accounts of the earlier volumes, including the following: Human salvation involves social-political as well as mystical dimensions and the two are necessarily interwoven. Efforts at earthly liberation are essential to, but not to be identified with, God's eschatological salvation. Final salvation involves not only transformation of finite human efforts, but also the redemption of human guilt (sin). Rather than a secular reduction of Christian faith, the ethical criterion of 'humanizing' is a condition of the possibility of the credibility of Christian faith.

The final chapters also trace in broad strokes the relationship between creation and salvation in Schillebeeckx's theology and the centrality of Jesus to understanding both. Here Jesus is described not only as 'salvation coming

from God' but also as 'concentrated creation' – the one in whom God's basic trust in mankind to bring about *shalom* within the chaos of history and mankind's basic trust in God's absolute presence and power at work in history take on their definitive historical form. Hence the life and ministry of Jesus provide Christians with the fullest possible vision of how to live and to contribute to the flourishing of mankind and all creation. But the life and ministry of Jesus cannot be understood apart from the death to which they led and God's 'final word' in raising Jesus from the dead. In light of his death and resurrection, Jesus is not only the definitive manifestation and interpreter of the kingdom of God, Schillebeeckx reminds his readers, but also its 'positive guarantor.'

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PREFACE

The event of revelation gives us occasion for thought via the mediation of faith experience. As a result the content of Christian faith which we have received is expressed in words which to a certain extent are already theological formulations: from the Bible, from the teachings of the church and from various theologians, as well as from descriptions of faith experiences. Therefore one can only speak sensibly about the content of faith at the level of theological scholarship if one simultaneously reflects on this way of speaking about the content of faith. The content of revelation is never given to us in a pure, cut-and-dried state, but rather in the language of faith, which already includes a certain degree of theological reflection; it is never the pure expression of immediate faith experiences. Therefore anyone who theologically investigates what the living tradition calls the revelatory value of Jesus of Nazareth also needs to consider the structure of this faith-inspired way of speaking about Jesus. Thus a reflection on the content of faith must at the same time be a reflection on the way in which people have thought and spoken about this content (always from particular theological standpoints).

It has often been said already that only after the conclusion of an investigation, and when a degree of detachment has become possible, can one take account of the ways and detours which seemed necessary in the course of the investigation. Methodology only becomes possible when one begins to reflect on the actual method of interpretation used in a particular study, in this case, my two books about Jesus: *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (here cited as: I), and *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World* (here cited as: II).

In this book, I would particularly like to clarify the presuppositions, the hermeneutic principles and the methods of interpretation from which and with which these two books were written and at the same time to go into some points which have been criticized by some reviewers or which some have used to give a distorted impression, especially of my first book about Jesus. Obviously I won't be discussing non-academic literature, in particular the literary genre of unchristian pamphlets and caricatures.

January 8, 1978
Edward Schillebeeckx

INTRODUCTION

Two parts of my proposed trilogy have been published so far: *Jesus,* which appeared in Dutch in 1974 and in an English translation in 1979, and *Christ,* which appeared in Dutch in 1977 and in an English translation in 1980. Their content can be described very briefly: the first is a book about Jesus which does not neglect the Christ; the second is a book about Christ which does not forget Jesus of Nazareth (II, 22).

As an objectified fact of language, a book can have repercussions for its author as long as he is still accessible. Of course the text which he has written has become an independent entity alongside and apart from its author, who can now join others in being the reader of his own book. However, as long as the author is alive, the text has not yet become completely objectified; in addition to reading his book, it is also possible to make personal contact with the author. But when interpreting these two books, I am just as much bound to my text as it objectively lies before us as my critics are, and in this respect I may not appeal to other possible intentions, at least if no trace of these intentions can be found in the actual books themselves. For the author, there is no getting around this. Here, at least in theory, an honest discussion is possible, based on a third factor held in common: my text.

Readers approach a book with their own questions. They are entitled to do so. Just remember that, while reading, it is possible to place an accent where the author did not intend it, and that readers may then judge the book in the light of that emphasis which they themselves have introduced. The pluralism of accents with which we live, especially in our churches, seems to me at the deepest level to be not so much a pluralism of dogmatic views as a 'pluralism of anxieties and concerns'. It is understandable that this in turn leads to a great many other accents, divergent questions, and finally perhaps even doctrines. We have to accept this multiplicity of concerns, but no one may monopolize his own concerns and anxieties as being the only ones that matter. The concern for 'orthodoxy' is justified; the concern to present the good news in its entirety but at the same time understandably is equally justifiable, and at certain times can even be urgent. And for the latter, a gradual initiation can be the most appropriate way to do this. That is what I was trying to do in these two books about Jesus. [002]

The two books have provoked a good deal of comment. As far as I am

aware, this has been positive on the whole, from both Protestants and Roman Catholics. In fact it is impossible to classify the responses purely along confessional lines. Approval or criticism crosses confessional lines. I still await representative Jewish reactions. I can therefore detect a consensus of favourable opinion about my books, despite criticisms of detail which do not affect the broad outlines of this christological approach. I am not ignoring the fact that some quite fundamental criticisms have been made; I will go into them later. However, the main purpose of this book is to clarify the hermeneutical principles on the basis of which my two Jesus books were written. Anyone who has misread my two books, i.e. read them from a different perspective than that in which they were written, will have a great many questions resolved here. This shorter book is not meant to be an *apologia* or an *oratio pro domo.* I shall acknowledge criticism where it hits the mark. Indeed, I specifically asked for (honest) criticism in the preface to my first book. However, it is striking that the most basic criticism has come, not from exegetes, about whose reactions I was curious, but from theologians. I have had letters of praise and encouragement, particularly from German and Anglo-Saxon exegetes. Perhaps this already says something about the current disquiet among *theologians,* about their inability to deal with the critical results of present-day exegesis. It may seem paradoxical, but I do have to confess that I do not attach the same importance to criticism from exegetes as I do to that of systematic theologians, though both are welcome. The reason for this is that exegetes themselves differ widely in their views about details and in the fact that exegetical criticism would only become systematically relevant where it overturned my basic propositions. However welcome it may be, it is peripheral if it is concerned with details which do not affect the direction and approach of this christological project. Consequently, I will not go into such details, even if exegetical criticism is justified. The essential question is whether this investigation, which is soteriological and therefore christological, has a sound basis in scripture.[1]

[1] After some hesitation, I have also decided not to go into criticisms which, even though worthwhile as contributions, in fact identify true Christianity or orthodoxy with its Roman-Hellenistic articulation, so that ultimately Greek philosophy becomes the criterion by which interpretations of faith are judged. Consequently I shall not discuss here the criticisms put forward by C. de Vogel, *De grondslag van onze zekerheid,* Assen-Amsterdam 1977. A rebuttal of these would require a separate book. Nonetheless, this book does indirectly make clear how often she wrongly interpreted my book.

Chapter 1

THE WAY TO CHRISTIANITY IN A MODERN WORLD

Before the Second Vatican Council a general renewal had already begun within Catholic theology, i.e. in the reflection of believers on what God's purpose is for us humans, in and through Jesus. This renewal had a single aim, that of returning to the sources. 'Back to the sources', people said; that was where it had all begun. This development enriched theology. However, several years now after the Council, theology has crossed a new and even critical threshold. More clearly than ever before, people have recognized that Christian theology always draws on two sources rather than one, and that these sources always need to remain in contact with each other. On the one hand we have the whole tradition of the experience of the great Jewish-Christian movement, and on the other hand the contemporary, new human experiences of both Christians and non-Christians. Psychology, the social sciences and even the natural sciences have their own contribution to make to the latter, because these also partly determine our concrete modern experiences. Personally, in my two books about Jesus, I see the relationship between both of these sources in this way: the second source, the ever-changing contemporary situation in which we live, is an intrinsic and constitutive element for understanding God's revelatory speaking in the history of Israel and of Jesus, which is confessed by Christians as being salvation from God for men and women, i.e. the first source. So it is not a matter of applying to our contemporary situation what we supposed we already were able to understand from the biblical tradition, as was often thought in the past. On the contrary, we have become increasingly aware that no one is in a position to rediscover *precisely* what the message of the gospel *now means to us*, except in relation to our present situation. The word 'God' had a central place in Jesus' message of salvation for man, but we can only use that word meaningfully in our lives – some of us, perhaps, only begin using that [004] word once again – when the word 'God' is actually experienced as a liberating answer to real life problems. If this is the case, there must also be real occasions for speaking about God in a humanly meaningful way in our present-day

experiences. Otherwise we are only traditionally repeating what others have taught us; but in such situations, modern people sooner or later drop what they have learned because they experience it as irrelevant for their everyday problems of life at a deeply human level. Modern people are no longer subject to the dictum 'like it or lump it'.

In fact this problem of the essential relationship between faith and experience or the world in which we live is not a new one. We can understand the whole history of theology, from the New Testament on, in the light of it. In the past, however, it was essentially a matter of the elitist experiences of intellectual clerics, i.e. of a series of ever new academic systems and methods, although these too were by no means unaffected by the general feelings of the time. Now the concern is with our everyday experiences, with the feelings of people living in the world, with their deepest problems concerning meaning, life and human society.

However, the disjunction between faith as it is actually practiced and contemporary experiences becomes especially serious in a modern world in which religion is no longer the cement of society and is therefore no longer reinforced by social and cultural life. This new situation exposes religion to all kinds of new risks, such as the tendency to retreat into the limited sphere of privacy, where it still seems to have a place; or the tendency to reduce religion to a school of social ethics (in the sense of an ethical revival or a form of social criticism) primarily in order to be able to regain, via macro ethics, the integrating power without which no religion can survive; or, finally, nostalgically to long for the old image of the church in which religion was the all-embracing and integrating factor of society.

Nowadays the institutional aspects of all religions are fundamentally subject to discussion, but not a single sociological analysis has shown that the religious
[005] and spiritual dimensions of human life have ceased to fascinate people. And although institutions and dogmatic positions are essential aspects of religion, they remain subordinate to religious experience, which has to do with God, i.e. with the religious orientation of faith.

On the other hand, we must note that especially in a secularized world, the experience of alienation makes itself felt in a new and more urgent way, especially because the secular belief in progress based on science and technology has been dealt such a powerful blow in modern times. The consequence of this is that experiences can seldom, if ever, be interpreted unequivocally as religious experiences. However, without risking self-destruction, religion can never relinquish its capacity for ultimate integration, even though it may now have a form which is different from those in former years. To be more specific, the integrating power of religion in no way coincides with the function it once had: religion is no longer needed to

maintain the basic values of a society or to legitimate social institutions which in former times did not seem capable of supporting themselves. Rather, one can say that precisely those experiences which make a modern person secular at the same time confront that person with new experiences and new choices. In a secularized world, a person no longer *undergoes* religion passively, in the sense of the Greek verb *paschein*, as a sort of 'high' experience, which a priori raises suspicion. The contemporary religious attitude seems to reflect a personal and reflective response to experiences which can point in different directions, both religious and non-religious. In spite of its apparent immediacy, religion had and still has a reflective element which does not necessarily take away its spontaneity. This only becomes more obvious in the secular world. The modern person reflects on certain experiences and, often feeling his way uncertainly, interprets them as religious. These ambiguous experiences are both positive (tending towards experiences of infinity) and negative (experiences of finiteness). These confront the modern person with a choice, that is, they are a call to an experience with those experiences.[2] Living in a void which can strike at any moment, along with a freedom which is both a permanent challenge and a burden, produces a feeling for the precariousness of our existence, which is perhaps more intense now than ever before. What is more, it is precisely in their social successes that people feel most threatened. *The threat itself takes on a 'transcendent' air.* Experiences of this kind are not in [006] themselves religious (some people even give up their old beliefs as a result), but they do bring a person to the edge, to an ultimate something: either to the conviction that the naked and empty fact of existence ultimately has the last bleak word; or to the positive belief in a merciful, transcendent reality. These ambiguous experiences provoke a choice; not a cerebral choice, but an experience with these ambivalent experiences in order to reach a meaningful interpretation. But the transition from vague, unfocused, ambiguous experiences to a positive religious experience leads (in each religious interpretation) to an integration of those first ambivalent experiences into a new experience, namely an experience of consciously anticipated totality, i.e.: religion. Such a person has an alternative experience with the experiences through which he has already passed.

However, this experience-with-experiences never factually occurs in the abstract nor in an isolated individual; it always occurs in someone who is

[2] As far as I am able to determine, the term 'experience with experiences' was first used by both Eberhard Jüngel, *Unterwegs zur Sache,* Munich 1972, 8 (and again in his newbook *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt,* Tübingen 1977, 25*),* and Gerhard Ebeling, 'Das Erfahrungsdefizit in der Theologie', in *Wort und Glaube* III,Tübingen 1975, 22, independently of one another. By this term both authors mean that experience of God or faith also essentially involves an experience of oneself and of the world. I agree, along with many others (see II, 56f), but here I myself use the term 'experience with experiences' in a somewhat different way, as is apparent from the context. However, in both senses it follows that theology always remains oriented towards experience (see II, 27-64).

living in a particular culture and with a religious tradition of such experiences, for example, Christian or Buddhist. This religious experience with ambivalent human experiences only becomes an experience of Christian faith when someone, as a result of what he has heard from Christians, arrives at the conviction within his experience-with-experiences, that 'Yes, this is how it is; this is it'. That which churches proclaim in their message as being a possibility for life, which can also be experienced by others, and which can be called a 'hypothesis' for these persons for the time being,[3] ultimately becomes within this experience-with-experiences (within the given hypothesis) a highly personal act of Christian faith, a personal conviction with a faith content that is specifically Christian. In a modern world people will no longer accept the Christian creed simply on the authority of others; but rather in and through an experience-with-experiences, which is interpreted in the light of what the church proclaims from a long history of Christian experience.

It looks as though for many people this will become the way to religion and Christianity, and no longer the way of being Christian-by-birth.

Extremely important consequences follow for catechesis and theology. These are also the fundamental presuppositions from which my two Jesus books have been written. For if I accurately perceived the prerequisite for belief in a
[007] modern world, this means that catechesis and proclamation will not only serve to clarify present-day human experience but that they will also have to develop as responsibly and accurately and evocatively as possible what the Christian orientation of life can specifically mean for people of our time. People have to know what 'hypothesis' they want to meddle in and get involved with. But if the churches hand on their long tradition of Christian experience in a conceptual framework which is unfamiliar to contemporary people, then most people are deprived in advance of any desire to take hold of this 'hypothesis' as a possible interpretation of their experiences. On the other hand, an experiential catechesis is not effectively Christian if it is carried out without developing the story of Jesus. According to the Christian faith tradition, God himself has shown who he is and how he wants to be experienced in a particular history, in an event grounded in Jesus and the history leading up to him. This history will need to be recounted as carefully as possible if people with their human experiences are going to be able to have a *Christian* experience. So experience of God is mediated through histories and stories which involve the hearers in such a way that, with and in human experiences, they are able to attain to similar, namely Christian, experiences.

The two books about Jesus were written based on this insight, at least at the

[3] The term 'hypothesis' comes from K. Popper's theory of science and is used in theology by H. Kuitert, *Wat heet geloven? Structuren en herkomst van de christelijke geloofsuitspraken,* Baarn 1976, esp. 115-119.

theological level if not at the catechetical level. From what I have said, it follows that the question as to whether faith comes from experience or from hearing, poses a false dilemma.

We cannot come to know who Jesus is simply from our present-day experiences. Those who were with him during his lifetime did get to know him then. For our knowledge of Jesus in whom we believe, we are dependent on people who have no other advantage over us than that they were present at that time. Jesus' disciples hand this history down to us in a tradition composed of words and Christian actions, a tradition which bridges the gulf between us and what happened then. In this sense, faith really is a faith which comes from hearing and from seeing the practices of the Christian church.

On the other hand, these disciples speak to us from their own experience. Our faith does not go back 'to heavenly words', but to an earthly event. Particular people experienced redemption and liberation in Jesus and began to communicate this experience to others. Their experience – for us – becomes a message. The beginning of the Christian tradition is, therefore, not a doctrine but rather a history of experience. It is not a neutral account of facts. In the [008] New Testament the disciples have expressed their reflections on what they experienced.

Experience is always a matter of interpretive perception. The scribes also experienced Jesus, but differently, namely, as a danger and a threat to their status. In contrast, the disciples experienced a liberating revelation in Jesus. On both sides, not only is the interpretation different, but also the experience as such. From the beginning, one group sees Jesus as a danger and a threat, whereas the other group sees him as salvation and liberation. Both groups see the words and deeds of Jesus in the light of their own perception of God.

The scribes perceived Jesus as committing offenses against the piety of the Law, whereas Jesus did not separate his experience of God as 'Abba, Father' from his liberating way of life. Jesus did not so much preach a new doctrine about God (a doctrine in contrast to the Yahwistic tradition within Judaism); rather, he had a particularly sharp prophetic eye for the actual social resonances of this concept of God in the society of his day, a concept of God which was detrimental to those who were held to be of little or no account. He unmasked a concept of God which enslaved people, and adopted the cause of a God who brought liberation to mankind. His experience of God as Abba is unique only within his liberating message and way of life.

Jesus addresses God as Father within the context of his liberating actions. Anyone who separates Jesus' experience of God as Abba from Jesus' deeds of healing, liberation and reconciliation misunderstands the reality of the historical Jesus.

Therefore, to proclaim Jesus as the Christ is not primarily a matter of

handing down a doctrine of faith; doctrine merely serves to hand down and evoke what has already been experienced. The doctrine itself is simply a well-considered ordering of reflections upon the content of salvation, the interpreted Christian perception of the Jesus event. It is also necessary for us to reflect upon our own experience! Here we are essentially involved in the continuation of the history of Christian experience.

However, it is only possible to appropriate this history to ourselves by means of a new experience, which in each case must be our own experience.
[009] Only then does living tradition arise, that is, a new living experience which becomes a living message for others.

Thus the question as to whether faith comes from hearing or from experience is a false dilemma, with the implication that the milieu or matrix in which Christian faith is cultivated is not only the church, but also – and at the same time – our everyday human experience of the world, both related to each other in a mutually critical correlation.

Chapter 2

IT BEGAN WITH AN EXPERIENCE

A specific experience stands at the beginning of Christianity. It began with an encounter. Some people, Jews, came into contact with Jesus of Nazareth. They were fascinated by him and stayed with him. This encounter and all that took place in Jesus' life and around his death gave new meaning and significance to their own lives. They felt born again, heard and understood. Their new identity was expressed in a new enthusiasm for the kingdom of God and therefore in a special compassion for others, their fellow men, as Jesus had shown them. This change in the orientation of their lives was the fruit of their real encounter with Jesus, for without him they would have remained who they were, as they themselves related later (see I Cor. 15.17). This had not been of their own initiative; it was something that had happened to them.

This surprising and overwhelming encounter of a few people with someone of their own ethnic group and religion, Jesus of Nazareth, became the starting point for the New Testament's vision of salvation. This already means that grace and salvation, redemption and religion, need not be expressed in unusual, heavy 'supernatural' terms, but rather in ordinary human language, the language of encounter and experience, especially that of images, witness, and story, never detached from specific liberating events. And yet, this is a matter of divine revelation.

In saying this, the fundamental hermeneutical principles of the two Jesus books are already implicitly suggested, as if they were the hinges on which the story of these two books turns. It is precisely this background against which the two books were conceived and developed that I would like to bring into the foreground here. This shift from background to foreground can get the [011] reading of these two books on the right track and, by doing so, clear the way of subjective prejudice from the start.

(a) Revelation and experience

The two Jesus books are written from the perspective which is self-evident in the Old and New Testaments, that revelation and experience are not opposed.

God's revelation follows the path of human experiences. Obviously revelation – pure initiative of God's free love of men – surpasses every human experience; in other words, it does not proceed from subjective human experience and thought; but it can only be perceived in and through human experiences. Apart from any experience, there is no revelation either. Divine revelation is the opposite of a human product or project, but this opposition in no way bars revelation from including human projects and experiences, and therefore in no way suggests that revelation should fall outside our experience. Revelation is communicated through a long process of events, experiences and interpretations. But when Christians assert that Jesus is God's decisive revelation, their own understanding of this has two aspects, namely objective and subjective. On the one hand, they are people (Christians) who assert: 'this is how *we* see him'. This assertion refers to specific effects which Jesus had on these disciples, who in their own language profoundly asserted, 'We have experienced Jesus as decisive and definitive salvation from God'. On the other hand, and again in accordance with this same understanding on the part of the disciples, this assertion also carries the intention, 'We must view him in this way, because this is how he is.' This assertion also says something about Jesus himself, namely, that he is God's supreme expression of himself. According to the New Testament, it is the particular relationship between Jesus and the kingdom of God which makes him our salvation, in so far as he makes us sharers in this relationship and thus opens us to Israel's age-old dream: The kingdom of God as human salvation. Even though the experience of salvation was primary, precisely this experience unavoidably provoked the question, 'Who is he who is able to do these things?' In other words, the New Testament speaks of the person of Jesus in such a way that this speaking clarifies how
[012] Jesus could do what he did. The disciples' faith does not constitute Jesus as God's definitive revelation, whereas without a faith experience, they could not have said anything about revelation either; the interpretive experience is an essential part of the concept of revelation. But if there really had been nothing going on with Jesus himself, and we would only hear subjective judgments about him in the New Testament, then in my opinion the basis for becoming or remaining a Christian would disappear, even if the New Testament can still offer us a great deal of inspiration. Soteriology is the way to christology – this certainly becomes clear from the New Testament.

People are aware that there is a difference between the way things really are and the way they appear to them. This does not in any way signify a dualism between 'events' and 'subjective experience'. The fact that someone has an experience is itself a new fact, and as such it should be distinguished from the way in which these facts are experienced by someone else or by the person concerned at another time. Thus, as experienced by us, the facts are by no

means exclusively structured by our personal perspective; even in the way in which they appear to us within our own perspective, they are also partly determined by their own 'unique contribution'. Accordingly our experience of things and events, in nature and in history, does not conform to these things and events. As a result, the 'way things go' often runs contrary to all our expectations. So then, checking out our projects, viewpoints, and expectations, that is, checking out the conformity of our assertions with the facts of experience is possible in principle and also feasible to a certain, meaningful and humanly satisfying extent. 'What presents itself' surpasses, in what it is, our perception and experience of it from our perspective, and, from our own side, we too as persons surpass our own somewhat unique perspective. Against this background, we must say that revelation takes place through a long process of events, experiences and interpretations, and not in a supernatural 'intervention', as it were 'by magic', even though it is in no sense a human product: it comes 'from above'. The self-revelation of God manifests itself not *from* our experiences but *in* them, as an inner reference to what the experience and the interpretive language of faith have called into being. In the faith-inspired response to experience, the fact of being addressed by God ultimately becomes clear, at least humanly speaking.

Thus men are in no way the ground of revelation; revelation, rather, is the ground of our response in faith. The 'co-constitutive' faith awareness [013] experiences itself as being constituted. But it is men who do claim to speak on the basis of revelation, and then they too must render account. Otherwise, one's own words and perspectives are all too easily presented as being what is called 'the Word of God' – that which comes 'from above'!

(b) Experience and interpretation

The second hinge on which my two Jesus books turn has to do with the relationship – in human experience, and therefore in the experiential aspect of revelation – between the element of experience and the element of interpretation or the expression of experience. Let us here call the latter the 'interpretative element', regardless of how other authors intend it. (see I, 746).

Interpretation does not begin only when one is questioned about the significance of what one has experienced. Interpretive identification is already an intrinsic element of the experience itself, first unarticulated, subsequently as conscious reflection. However, there are interpretive elements in our experiences which find their basis and source directly in what is experienced, as content of a conscious and so somewhat clear experience, and there are also interpretive elements which are handed to us from elsewhere, outside at least this experience, even though this distinction is never clearly maintained. For

example, an experience of love contains interpretive elements within the experience itself, suggested by the concrete experience of love. The love that is experienced knows what love is, and it even knows more about it than it can express at the moment. This interpretive identification is therefore an intrinsic moment of the love that is experienced. Afterwards, it is possible that one may also express the experience of love in language taken from *Romeo and Juliet,* from the biblical *Song of Songs,* from St. Paul's hymn to love or from all kinds of modern poetry. This additional thematizing in no way means a nonchalant or superfluous elaboration. Interpretation and experience have a reciprocal
[014] influence on each other. Real love lives on the love experience and on its own progressive self-expression (in I, 548-549, I call expressions based on the first, original, interpretive experience 'first order statements'). However, this growing self-expression makes it possible to deepen the original experience; based on the experience, it reveals that experience more explicitly to itself (in I, 548-549, I call expressions based on a more advanced, reflexive, interpretive experience 'second order statements', which in no sense has to have the rather unfavourable connotation of 'second-rate' statements).

In the same way, the initial experience of encountering Jesus which some people had also developed into a progressive self-expression which ultimately resulted in what is called *christology*. A christology (which keeps to its proper subject matter) is, therefore, the story of a special encounter experience which identifies what it *experiences*, that is, which gives a name to the object of the experience.

After a certain time, these identifying experiences of the first Christians were put down in writing. Each individual New Testament book is in fact concerned with the salvation experienced in and through Jesus. The experiences of grace expressed in the New Testament interpret one and the same fundamental event and a common basic experience which all acknowledge, even though each New Testament book expresses the same basic experience in quite varied ways. The synoptic gospels as well as Pauline theology and Johannine theology (to mention just three fundamental currents in the New Testament) were themselves situated within the context of a history in which the experience of salvation and grace as well as its interpretation had already been given: in the Old Testament, in the inter-testamental period and in the early Christian or pre-New Testament period.

Whoever reviews this entire historical process will understand that the New Testament theology of salvation and redemption cannot be made to speak to our condition as it stands; in other words, this biblical vision cannot directly or 'unmediatedly' speak to us. The consequence of this is: a theological analysis of the concepts of salvation in the New Testament only has a meaningful chance of serving as inspiration and orientation for contemporary people if this

theological analysis is coupled with an insight into the historical intermediaries, of that time and of the present day. In the New Testament we are confronted with a basic experience which binds all these writings together [015] and for that reason ultimately caused them to be incorporated into a canonical 'New Testament': Jesus, experienced as the decisive and definitive salvation event; salvation from God, Israel's age-old dream. But precisely because it is a matter of experience, these authors express this salvation in terms of the world in which they live, their own milieu and their own questions – in short, their own world of experience. And precisely this allows substantial differences within the New Testament to be seen. This is the reason why the documents speak in such varied ways about the significance of Jesus to salvation. (II, 112-628).

I wanted to chart all these variations, both those predating the New Testament (principally in I) and those within the New Testament (principally in II). My question was (in brief): how do the various New Testament authors interpret the basic experience they had when encountering Jesus? For particular experiences always take place within a specific interpretive frame of reference, which colours the basic experience. People never experience salvation in the abstract, but rather in the context of their own life (which differs from one person to another). Therefore it is always necessary to investigate that context as well, because the relationship of the New Testament authors to their present day also determined how they experienced and understood salvation in Jesus – even though the invariable problems of life, differently experienced by each one, continually recur within that context.

However, even when we have thoroughly investigated this horizon, we are still not finished. For we, for our part, live in another environment, with other questions and problems as well as the perennial human problems, even if these are encountered in other social and cultural settings with their own distinctive features. So we cannot simply 'adapt' what we found in the Bible to our own environment, as if we had been able to extract a timeless kernel from a historical shell. The New Testament authors never deliver the Christian message to us cut-and-dried; it is always coloured by and with their own environment at that time. That raises the question: to what extent can this – personally and collectively – coloured biography of their experience of salvation in Jesus still inspire and guide us now? And are we as Christians bound to all the interpretative elements, i.e. to all the Jewish and Greek experiential terminology from that environment of that time? In the course of [016] the Christian tradition of experience, now almost 2000 years, the interpretive elements will have increasingly accumulated. And rightly so! Since in every era Christians will have tried to express their experience of salvation in Jesus in their own contemporary experiential terminology. But then there is the danger

that Christians of today cling to specific *interpretative elements* from the past more than to the saving reality which is interpreted in many languages and tongues within those elements. For Christians of the past, many of these explanations were living expressions of everyday life experiences in their social and cultural milieu (e.g. the ransom or redemption of slaves; cultic animal sacrifices; having a powerful advocate in higher circles; a world ruler; etc.), whereas for us this is no longer the case. One absolutely cannot require Christians all through the ages, Christians who believe in the saving power of Jesus' life and death, to believe in all these other interpretative elements or explanations as well! Images and interpretations which were once appropriate and evocative can become quite irrelevant in another culture. It is a real question whether someone in our contemporary culture, which for example abhors sacred massacres, will still be able to call the saving significance of Jesus' death a bloody cultic offering demanded by an angry God who has to be appeased by means of this offering. In modern circumstances this will precisely discredit authentic belief in the real saving significance of this death; it runs counter to critically sound modern experiences.

The New Testament feels free to use divergent concepts to speak of the experience of salvation with Jesus, provided that what was actually manifested in Jesus is really articulated in these divergent interpretaments. This gives us as well the freedom to depict anew the same experience of salvation which we have in Jesus, and to write it out using key words borrowed from our contemporary modern culture with its own problems, expectations and needs; even if once again these themselves are also under criticism from the expectation of Israel *as* it was fulfilled in Jesus. Even more, we have to do this in order to be able to remain faithful to what the New Testament Christians have experienced in Jesus as salvation and have propagated as message and therefore have promised us. The next section will show even more pointedly why this is so necessary.

[017]

(c) Interpretive experience and thinking in models

The brief account of revelation, experience and interpretation, given above, would give us a distorted image of the actual process of revelation if we would only want to use it to assert that conceptual and visual articulations are also associated with every experience. Our times have arrived at the insight that concept and model are not the same. Since I. Kant and the contemporary epistemological discussions centring on K. Popper, T. S. Kuhn, I. Lakatos, P. Feyerabend, the Erlangen School, etc. (see the literature in II, 37 [853f]., n. 1), the insight has grown that a theory or model has a certain primacy above the experience; at least in this sense, that, on the one hand, there are no experiences

without at least an implicit theory and, on the other hand, that theories cannot be derived from experiences by means of induction, but are the human spirit's own creative initiative.

It follows from this that biblical or ecclesial expressions of faith as well are not, pure and simple, articulated expressions or interpretations of specific 'immediate religious experiences' (e.g. experiences of Jesus). Consciously or less consciously they also express theory. The so-called interpretive moment of the experience is itself included in a more general, namely theoretical, interpretive framework. We can identify such theoretical frameworks in the Old and New Testaments themselves. Both series of writings do not simply express immediate religious experiences; they also work with theoretical models by means of which they try to grasp Israel's experiential history. Thus in the Old Testament the Yahwist interprets Israel's experiential history in a different way from, for example, the Priestly and the Deuteronomic traditions. Accordingly, they work with different interpretive models; to put it in modern terms: with divergent theories. Perhaps less obviously but just as truly, the New Testament does the same thing, just as the conciliar dogmas came into being within a specific way of thinking-in-models. I did no more than touch on this fundamental aspect in II, 30-79 (see especially II, 32-33); I did not develop it at length, even though this problem might require more precise elaboration. Nevertheless, this awareness of the presence of theoretical models, in terms of which all religious, biblical and dogmatic statements are made, has consciously [018] guided me in the actual development of my two Jesus books.

It is not so very different in faith and theology from the way it is in the sciences and ordinary human experiences: articulated experiences are already subjected to a theory (whether explicitly or not). From the controversies concerning the influence of experience on theory and of theory on experience, it has become clear in our time that to dogmatize experience is just as unjustified as to dogmatize theory. On the other hand, we cannot help but affirm that every statement of faith is not pure rendition of a religious experience either (whether or not with one's own or with foreign concepts); but that it is also theory (and that accordingly this has to be tested). Naively trusting in so-called immediate experiences seems to me, therefore, to be a form of neo-empiricism. It has been said that a theory as such never comes into being by means of induction from experiences; it is an autonomous datum of the creative human spirit by means of which the human person deals with new experiences, while being already familiar with a long history of experiences. Accordingly, what someone calls a religious experience contains not only interpretation (in the sense of specific concepts and images), but a theoretical model as well, on the basis of which divergent experiences are synthetically integrated.

A statement of faith – in other words, every form of religious language which speaks about revelation – at the same time handles a theoretical model which, as such, remains hypothetical, while nonetheless in itself it forms an image of that which is experienced, and therefore of what has been revealed in the experience, in the specific articulation of the experience. Therefore, statements of faith are also theoretical statements and not simply 'statements of experience'. Like every theory, they set out, as far as possible, to explain or illustrate the experiential phenomena as simply and as clearly as possible. One theory does this better than another. Thus in the Old Testament, the Priestly tradition uses a quite different interpretive model for the historical experience – a model based on stabilization – than the prophetic model, which is oriented towards change and the future.[4] The Priestly interpretation of experiences from Israel's history honors the model of an ideal, stable world, whereas the Deuteronomic model interprets experiential data in terms of the Exodus
[019] model: rising up out of stability towards an ever better future. Theories are human hypotheses, inventions, a 'framework' in which one tries to give data a meaningful place. As such, their significance lies in their ability to give data belonging to a specific area of reality a meaningful setting, as far as that may be possible and as simply as possible.

Consequently the whole of revelation expresses itself in a long process of events, experiences and interpretations, as well as of interpretations within specific, divergent models or theories. The revelation, as the ineffable, and especially as that which underpins faith, moves believers to action and gives them something to think about, supports and includes not only the faith experience but its interpretation as well, and the latter precisely within divergent models or theories. The christologies of the New Testament are also a clear proof of this. By dint of both the interpretive and the theoretical moment (the result of thinking in models), that which is revealed becomes a thoroughly human event when brought up for discussion by believers; however it is an event which owes neither its content nor its own act of faith to itself. All this safeguards that the revelation is not founded by us, but at the same time it is a warning for every fundamentalist explanation of both the Bible and church dogma. That does not make it any easier for us to explain the faith in a faithful Christian manner, for the one doing the explaining, in turn, is also thinking in models. But the insight into this structure of revelation and the act of faith corresponds more closely to the real data of the actual process of revelation and therefore keeps us on solid ground.

[4] See N. Lohfink, *Unsere Grossen Wörter. Das Alte Testament zu Themen dieser Jahre,* Freiburg 1977, esp. 44-56, 76-91 and 156-189.

Chapter 3

THE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION IN JESUS AND THE EARLIEST CHRISTIAN TITLES

In my first book, *Jesus: An Experiment in christology*, I do in fact raise the question about the origin of the first Christian titles given to Jesus, even about the pre-New Testament titles which were given by the very first Christians coming from Judaism and which can be historically retrieved with some degree of certainty. This in no way means that these most ancient titles would also be the most warranted or the most definitive. I say this explicitly: nor can 'the earliest image of Jesus that we could reconstruct […] function as a norm or a constant unitive factor' (I, 53-54), and: 'however important the oldest tradition may be ..., the first articulated experience of recognizing-and-remembering is not *ipso facto* the richest or most subtle one' (I, 54). Some reviewers seem to have missed these sentences while reading. I do say that these oldest traditions, 'as a delimiting and admonitory factor, [are] also important for the evolutionary process in which people try to verbalize more precisely the richness of their actual experience' (ibid.); and finally, 'Early and subsequent formulations of an experience often provide a reciprocal critique' (ibid.). All of this means that, because of the structure of interpretive experience and its progressive experiential interpretation (see Chapter 2 (b) above), a reconstruction of the oldest Christian titles given to Jesus really is of substantial *importance* (without enjoying any *priority*) because further analysis also reveals an 'ideengeschichtlich [history of ideas]' aspect; i.e., it is led by the original experience as already articulated in a specific way. In this complex situation there is a risk that further analysis can favour the interpretive aspect to the disadvantage of the experiential aspect, with the danger that merely an 'Ideengeschichte' might come into being without any connection back to the [021] experience. This is exactly what I mean by 'constraining admonition',[5] which

[5] Albeit via historical reconstructions, this expression points to the 'giving side' on the part of Jesus as having priority over the response in faith on the part of the believers, no matter how

can be provided by the earliest interpretations of Jesus.

(a) The structure of the process of attributing titles to Jesus in the New Testament: the false dichotomy between a christology of function and a christology of essence

Already at birth everyone receives a name, a name which is provided by others. With this name, the newborn baby enters upon the process of fulfilment, as a unique person in a network of human relationships. By being given a name, one is acknowledged in one's own uniqueness: accepted by parents and family, and is allowed to be there. In this way, via the acceptance by a smaller community, the neophyte begins to grow into the wider human community. In an original way this new being with its own irreplaceable name takes up the thread of the 'human story' already begun long ago, becoming personally accountable and adding a new chapter to it. What one's story will concretely be can only be related at one's death, for before death one continually has to take into account the possibility of a change in life's course or at least new accents.

That is how a certain Jewish man from Nazareth got the name Jesus (that is, 'salvation') at birth. Precisely what this name meant could only become fully evident from the life of this person at his death.

Now it is striking that certain persons are given a second name, in order to express what they actually came to mean to others, based on what they concretely did. Thus Abram was named Abraham, Jacob Israel, Saul Paul and Simon Peter, the rock on which the early Christian community was built. Then the second name is the name of a function or an official title (see I, 493). Someone receives such a second name based on what that person means to others. In the religious sphere, one rightly acknowledges a commission or calling from God in such a name.

In the same way, Jesus is called 'Christ' by Jews who 'followed after' him and for whom he came to be of decisive significance in their lives; even 'the Christ': the Anointed One (messiah), namely, the one anointed by God's Spirit
[022] (Isa. 61.1; 52.7) to save his people, to bring salvation, redemption and liberation. 'Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God *has made* him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2.36; elsewhere, by virtue of an 'anointing', Acts 4.27, based on Isa. 61.1-2; see also 52.7).

'Jesus is the Christ' is then already a confession of faith: the statement *implies* that people who refer to him by this title have themselves experienced and

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firmly both aspects are intertwined in the New Testament and never can be separated from each other in a cut-and-dried manner.

continue to experience decisive salvation from God in and through this human person, Jesus. Therefore it is not a descriptive affirmation, as when someone would say, 'Jesus, who is called the Christ by Christians'.

This process of acknowledging Jesus and giving him titles began in a sphere of ambiguity, questions and presumptions. In the actual structure of the four gospels, the authors still allow this process to re-echo clearly , – even though in the meantime the author and the reader already do know the final result. The explicit titles, on which the writing of the four gospels is based, do not stand at the beginning of the actual process of giving these titles; rather, they appear after, or towards the end of, the experiential contact with Jesus – comprising one or at the most two years, from Jesus' baptism in the Jordan until his death. Jesus' true *name* or *identity* – from a Jewish point of view, the one is the other – was therefore unknown at the beginning, actually just as it is for all human persons. 'What will become of this child?' is a question which can be heard at the birth of every human child, whether or not it be spoken aloud. Even in the gospels, which are written from the perspective of an identifying title, the 'indirect' course of the acknowledgment process is maintained (see especially II, 826-832, on the process of identifying Jesus in the four gospels). From this, it seems that Jesus himself remained more reserved about revealing his identity directly (with the exception of the Gospel of John, which takes as its theme the powerlessness to understand Jesus). That is precisely why, historically, we can say very little directly about Jesus' own *psychology* that is meaningful. Others have to identify him and acknowledge him in and through what he says and does. This *so-called indirect* way comes suggestively to the fore in the Gospel of Matthew, where the prisoner, John the Baptist, sends some of his disciples to Jesus with the question, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' (Matt. 11.3). The answer is, 'the blind receive their sight . . . and the [023] poor have good news brought to them' (Matt. 11.5). Here Jesus replies by pointing to his words and deeds. Just as in Ex. 3.14 the name or identity of Israel's God is not disclosed directly, but only by indicating what this God does with the people of Israel – 'I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt' (Ex. 3.16), in other words, 'I am: 'in solidarity with the people'' – so in Matthew's account Jesus says, 'I am: bearer of the glad tidings to the poor, the one who takes away all evil.' Jesus, too, is: 'I am: 'in-solidarity-with-my-people''. This function *is* his nature, just as in I John 4.8 and 16b the nature of God is 'love of mankind'. The *modern* distinction between christology of function and christology of essence falls completely outside the categories of the New Testament. Jesus' very being *is* salvation-from-God.

The implications of this 'indirect' naming as expressed in Matt. 11.5 go even further. By means of the identifying title, Jesus is at the same time acknowledged as the fulfillment of an Isaianic promise (Isa. 29.18-19; 35.4-6;

61.1-2, which is implicitly cited here). From this the structure of the New Testament titles given to Jesus becomes clear: it concerns an explicit acknowledgment (and recognition) of what was previously 'already known' vaguely, at least as promise. There was already a specific pattern of expectation from the Jewish tradition of religious experience. However, the explicit identification is anything but obvious and point-blank, for what immediately follows is: 'Blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me' (Matt. 11.6). To recognize Jesus as the Christ is not an objective observation (and therefore can even less be proved by the historical-critical method). This acknowledgment demands a fundamental *metanoia* in which the entire person of the one who is acknowledging Jesus as the Christ is transformed: to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ is, therefore, in a word, a new self-knowledge as well, in and through a renewal of life. You cannot have one without the other if Christian faith is not to become a dead formula, – which in no way means that the one is the same as the other. That is why I also acknowledge this *metanoia* aspect, essential and necessary for a true confession of Christ, in the definitive apostolic acknowledgement of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, which the New Testament describes in the form of appearances (I, 390-391 see I, 379-390). After
[024] all, to call Jesus 'the Christ' is to give him a title based on a concrete *experience of salvation*, redemption and liberation, from God, in and through Jesus.

Giving Jesus an identifying title is therefore a single reality with two sides: – (a) a *projective* side or an element of projection, i.e. titles which were already known to Jews, later also to gentile Christians, from their own religio-cultural tradition and which were projected onto Jesus (exegesis speaks of titles of eminence, such as Christ, Son of God, as well as metaphors, such as: living water, good shepherd, bread from heaven); and: – (b) a *giving* side, an element comprising an offer or proposal from the Jesus of history. Jesus himself is the initiative, the one who elicits the projections which become titles, through what he, from his life and death, appeared to be (I, 51-56). In this process of giving titles, 'priority must be conceded to what is actually offered in Jesus' (I, 57 and 21). But this process of giving titles also contains a critical element: the titles which are already known (Christ, Son of God, etc.) and consequently the salvific expectations already contained in them 'do [not] determine who Jesus is, but the other way round: starting from the peculiar and quite specific historical existence of Jesus, th existing expectations are partly assimilated, of course, yet at the same time transformed, reappraised or corrected' (I, 21). One does, then, reach for pre-existing models, but all models fall apart under the pressure of what Jesus really was, said and did: 'Proceeding not from the existing model but from what had been manifested to them historically in Jesus, they seized on that model as the best reflection or reproduction of the impression Jesus had made upon them' (I, 481), and 'they do so in somewhat

alien conceptual terms in order to express its proper nature' (I, 50) This is not to deny the projective character of giving titles; but it does control and limit it. Jesus is no unknown figure upon whom people can arbitrarily project their needs and expectations! Why would we still need Jesus, if we were simply to project all that is already familiar to us onto him? It is precisely what is new, which has appeared in Jesus, that – (a) makes us reach for what is, in a certain sense, familiar to us, in order to be able to articulate this new thing in our own understandable language, at least to some extent, and that – (b) at the same time shatters the already familiar meaning of these titles: Jesus *is* the messiah, *but not like* many Jews of that time, and initially Jesus' disciples as well, had expected the messiah to be. There is a negative theology in the titles which the New Testament gives to Jesus. Jesus *is* 'the Lord', but not like despots were [025] 'Kyrios' in those days; he is the Lord who denounces all master-servant relationships: 'it may not be like that among you' (= Jesus' followers) (Luke 22.24-27; Mark 10.42-43; Matt. 20.25-26). Despite all the Jewish and 'pagan' titles with which Christians identify Jesus, Jesus remains 'a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles' (I Cor. 1.23). This once again emphasizes that the Christian titles given to Jesus *also* imply a renewal of life cognitively: a *metanoia* of insight as well, in other words, faith!

Precisely because of this tension within the titles applied to Jesus, they are to a great degree 'interchangeable, replaceable by others, and they sometimes died out' (I, 46). New ones can also come into being. Not long after the New Testament, church fathers call Jesus 'the new Orpheus', whose music raises and heals human hearts. This must have especially appealed to Greek Christians. I have repeatedly noticed how some Christians were momentarily startled when I have spoken of 'Christ Orpheus' – in the sense of: '*this* can't be right', while they regard it as self-evident when the Gospel of John speaks of 'Jesus Logos'. Yet these church fathers, speaking from their religio-cultural milieu, were doing nothing other than what the Gospel of John did when it called Jesus 'the Word' (Logos). Naturally, none of these titles are completely 'innocent'.

So we can see a basic hermeneutical principle in the process of giving titles to Jesus in the New Testament (comparable to the way in which Christians throughout the subsequent Christian tradition will give Jesus 'new titles' time and time again), namely: the origin of the explicit title which we attribute to Jesus, based on a concrete salvific experience with him lies, on the one hand, within our present world of experience, that is, within our contemporary experiences of dealing with fellow human persons within a changing and changed culture in which we live; on the other hand, however, the relevant keywords which we take from our contemporary experience of life and the world, and which we then 'project' onto Jesus (e.g. Jesus the liberator), likewise

become subject to criticism in terms of who Jesus really was. It can never be a matter of a smooth correlation between our expectations and who Jesus was in reality, neither in the New Testament nor for us. Therefore, every Christian
[026] title given to Jesus of Nazareth must be fundamentally critical both with regard to every reduction of Jesus as a specific historical phenomenon, as well as with regard to the cultural tradition and experiences from which we nonetheless draw our appropriate titles for him. And so we, in the twentieth century, coming from our own deepest human experiences, will be more likely to call Jesus the liberator rather than the redeemer. This happens everywhere. But from historical study of the New Testament we know (what without this study can easily be overlooked) that while recourse to key words from our own tradition of human experience can repeatedly provide the most appropriate title for Jesus, at the same time this title too ought to be radically transformed if it is going to be valid for Jesus himself. Otherwise, we are only attributing to Jesus what we already knew from elsewhere, in particular, from our growing human experience of life. Sometimes I miss this critical aspect in today's Christian literature when contemporary titles are given to Jesus. Even though the origin of the contemporary titles we give Jesus be found in our actual so-called 'secular' experiences of life and the world, this process of attributing a title (if it is to be authentically Christian) is nonetheless subject to the critique of what Jesus really was historically (and in order to understand what Jesus really was, the entire scope of the extensive Jewish prehistory of Jesus as well as the history of what followed must be taken into consideration). So, from our own experience, Jesus may be called liberator rather than redeemer; however, given the structure of the process used to attribute titles to Jesus in the New Testament, this does confront us with the question, 'What precisely is true liberation?', and therefore with the question, 'What, at the deepest level, is the basis and source of human alienation and bondage?', and therefore, 'What kind of salvation, what is the nature of the salvation which Israel expected and which Jesus offered mankind?': the kingdom of God as salvation for and from human beings. In this way that which we as human beings ourselves already may be able to know and which we ourselves can formulate, through theory and praxis, becomes clearly subjected to the transforming critique of Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ. This is also one of the reasons why Pauline theology and early Christian hymns assert that Jesus is given a name 'above every name' (Phil. 2.9; Eph. 1.21). No single title from our human knowledge and experiential tradition really hits the mark; every title used must be provided with qualifications which we can only find in the entirety of Jesus' life's work, and that, indeed, within the horizon of
[027] understanding of the Old Testament. Consequently, the game we play projecting titles – as human persons we cannot do anything else! – is clearly

continually subject to the critique of who Jesus really was. Precisely because of this, the historical question about Jesus, within very specific limits, also takes on a theological and religious significance.

(b) The historical study of Jesus

(i) No neo-liberalism

There is a grain of truth in R. Bultmann's reluctance to attach any dogmatic significance to the 'historical Jesus' (about whom, also according to Bultmann, there is nonetheless a great deal to relate that is genuinely historical). The truth is this: no historically reconstructed data about Jesus can show that he is the Christ. This seems evident to me, and as far as I know, it is also a consensus among contemporary theologians. I have already said: to call Jesus 'the Christ' is not the result of a scholarly reconstruction; this affirmation includes a transformed self-knowledge as an element of *metanoia* and renewal of life. As the Christ, Jesus can never be approached in a purely academic, objectifying manner. Without being 'received' in faith by others, Jesus would not be the Christ for them. In this reception and attribution of titles in the New Testament, the memory of what Jesus really was historically is also taken up in a kerygmatic narrative (which is something other than a modern 'historical account'). While relating their memories of Jesus of Nazareth, the gospels are at the same time confessing him to be the Christ who is living among them in the church. However, Bultmann is wrong when he associates every theological interest in the question of the historical Jesus with the indeed illegitimate and unfeasible attempt to prove the church's kerygma of the New Testament – that Jesus is the Christ – historically. If historical knowledge of Jesus is possible (as Bultmann too affirms; and this is difficult to deny now), then every faith-inspired vision of Jesus – i.e. every faith-inspired identification of Jesus as definitive salvation from God – is only justified if this identifying interpretation includes this historical knowledge in a consistent way. Precisely because the Christian starts with the premise that this is the case – namely, that [028] the kerygmatic narrative of the Jesus of the New Testament, even though it be related by others, is full of memories of Jesus' words and deeds, Jesus' life and death, of precisely what obliged these people to attribute their Christian titles – precisely because of this, the historical question concerning Jesus' exact message and praxis or way of life also has a christological relevance.

One would have to deny the theological significance of this in order to remain consistent only if one were to assert that what applies for some historical personages, applies equally for Jesus (which some actually do, wrongly in my opinion), namely: certain historical figures have symbolic dimensions attributed to them which are representative of concrete

possibilities for human life, whatever they may have been historically; others make them into a representative symbol, completely.[6] In other words, of the two elements which we identified in the process of attributing christological titles to Jesus, only the element of projection is retained. From the analysis of the process of attributing titles to Jesus in the New Testament (above), it appears that this cultural-anthropological model, i.e. projection, does *play* a substantial *part*, but that, given the religious intentionality of scripture and tradition, this model is subject to the critical correction of that which is of God and which really did historically appear in Jesus. It is not a matter of a human event alone, in which people see their own deepest understanding of life revealed in Jesus – Jesus, as an exegete of the deepest and most definitive human existential experiences – but at the same time and therein, of a confession that we know ourselves to be addressed in Jesus because of God's own intention concerning him. Then God is not acknowledging a cultural-anthropological model or process, but this person Jesus. And then it certainly is important what this person really was historically. This reconstruction is in no sense about a historical-psychological reconstruction of Jesus' mental states; indeed, there is little to say about that, and theologically it is not so relevant either. Rather, it is an attempt to sight in on the thrust of Jesus' message and way of life, of his ministry and death, as accurately as possible historically, because they externalize what Jesus' understanding of God, of the human person and the world, and of their mutual relationship was; for after all, it is this message and these actions, Jesus' entire mode of appearance,, which led certain people to acknowledge 'the Christ' – definitive salvation from God – in
[029] him in an act of faith which also put them right with themselves. People did not proclaim Jesus to be 'the Christ' despite of or apart from what he really was historically. Well then, a historical reconstruction is precisely an aid for getting the 'objective', provocative side as well as the subjective 'projective' side more clearly in sight *within* the process of attributing titles to Jesus in the New Testament, even though both aspects can never be purely separated. A sort of uninterpreted 'Jesus in himself', who would be able to be recognized through the lines of the New Testament, does not exist. To call my approach neo-liberalism or to claim that I am nonetheless seeking a pre-kerygmatic Jesus[7] contradicts the statement of fundamental principles and the entirety of

[6] According to, among others, Charles Davis, 'Religion and the Sense of the Sacred', in *C.T.S.A., Proceedings of the Thirty-First Annual Convention,* New York 1976, 87-105, and, with some nuances, also David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order,* New York 1975, 214-223.

[7] Although W. Kasper, 'Liberale Christologie', in *Evangelische Kommentare,* H. .6, 1976, 357-360, does not do this explicitly (the title does not seem to be his own), he nonetheless does say that my theological attempt 'Grundanliegen der liberalen Theologie, besonders van W. Herrmann, in neuer Weise wieder aufnimmt' [once again takes up the fundamental concerns of liberal theology, especially those of W. Herrmann, in a new way] (360). This seems to me to be a misunderstanding of my own theologically oriented intellectual curiosity which guided my study of Jesus, in

their practical elaboration in my Jesus books. Faith seeking historical understanding[8] is an intrinsic consequence of the fact that, in Christianity, it not only has to do with a definitive message from God, but at the same time with the person of Jesus Christ, someone who has appeared in our history and who therefore must also be given a place within the whole of the history of God-with-us. This poses a fundamental question to purely literary-critical exegesis, which only wants to deal with 'texts' with an almost self-evident modern-critical disdain for the historical question about Jesus. Due to what is specific about the Christian 'given' – the Jewish man Jesus Christ – such an exegetical attitude, if meant to be definitive, is religiously untenable.

In addition, there were all kinds of historically concrete motives for assigning an important place to the historical question of Jesus in my first Jesus book. I will mention just one of them here. A year before the publication of the Dutch edition of *Jesus,* R. Augstein's Jesus book appeared in German.[9] At that time, newspapers, weeklies and periodicals wrote extensively about it. Some people got the impression that the church had told them fables and legends and that 'historical criticism' had now made it clear that the Jesus-of-history cannot support the whole structure and superstructure which the church has built up as a result of the historical phenomenon Jesus. At that time someone asked me, in all seriousness, how I could still remain a Christian after reading Augstein! Theologians can easily ignore Augstein's book, but then they forget the influence of this and similar literature on many Christians and act as if the concrete faith were contained within a private church court and would not [030] exuberantly share in the weal and woe of 'the world'. Without engaging in polemic against books like Augstein's, I wanted to make it clear to Christians that the theological use of the historical sciences in no sense has to erode faith; that this use can critically accompany faith and can help it in its own way.

The history of dogma, which contributes a great deal to faith-inspired understanding of a dogma, does not begin only after the New Testament, but already was beginning before and in the New Testament. A classically conceived christology which does not respond to all these problems will inevit-

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accordance with the tone of my book itself as well, an interest which proceeds from a very different horizon of experience, questions, and understanding than that of Herrmann. According to Kasper, despite formal statements of basic principles and despite the actual tone of my book, I nonetheless would be seeking 'a pre-kerygmatic and pre-dogmatic Jesus' as a criterion for all Christology (op.cit., 359). He adds: and then the pre-New Testament strata and especially Q would become theologically normative, because these have no Easter kerygma (whereby he forgets that Q can only be understood from the perspective of a parousia *kerygma*: I, 334). This is a total misunderstanding of the motives why I study Q specifically, without giving this tradition any theological priority (see below for more about this).

[8] As in an article by me, which is a reply to H. Berkhof's review of my first Jesus book: '*Fides quaerens intellectum historicum'*, in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 29, 1975, 332-349.

[9] R. Augstein, *Jesus der Menschensohn,* Gütersloh 1972, published in English as *Jesus the Son of Man*, 1977.

ably foster short-circuiting among believers. So the problem which had arisen had to be addressed in a Christian and non-conventional manner by responding to the critical questions simply as these are posed, at least within the Western problem-consciousness. After all, real theologizing only makes sense within the historically specific, actually given problem-consciousness, which is not always and everywhere the same. For example, no one will assert that historical consciousness has the same significance in an Asian or African culture that it has in the modern West. Moreover, once a general consensus is achieved that the faith-inspired interpretation of Jesus in the New Testament proceeds in any case from a very concrete historical person whose conduct and actions are, broadly speaking, historically fixed, then in the West also at least the explicit problem of the historical question of Jesus will disappear from theology. All this inescapably provides theologically relevant thinking with a very personal but also relative temporal index: it is historically and even geographically localized. But a theology which is written for eternity, i.e. a theology stripped of historicity, would be irrelevant for people living in time. Other people than the theologian often dictate to him what he has to do here and now. If the theologian wants to continue to be relevant to life, he must continually revise his own 'theological project', basing it on real questions which are alive among the people. If this did not happen, theological books would not even be read, while it does appear that many people do read books written by those who attempt such an appraoch.

That is why I decided to follow the strict historical-critical method, especially in my first Jesus book, in order to discover what can be established with certainty or a high degree of probability about the historical appearance
[031] of Jesus. By doing this, I cherished the hope that it would then become possible to catch a glimpse of what in Jesus must have been the source of both the positive and the negative shock for his contemporaries. This shock must have been there, given the fact that, on the one hand, Jesus was executed and, on the other hand, his followers were utterly devastated by his death initially and thought that all hope for Israel had been lost. Naturally I did not want to prove the Christian faith by means of a historical analysis, which in any case would have to be called a rather absurd undertaking. This was my intention: 'My purpose is to look for possible evidence in the picture of Jesus reconstructed by historical criticism, pointers that could direct human inquiry regarding our "well-being" to the Christian tender of a reply that refers to a particular saving action of God in this Jesus' (I, 34; I, 103; I, 258f.). To call this neo-liberalism or, even worse, heresy, is to fail to take an author seriously, but rather only intellectual currents or a vague history of ideas, whereby an author's uniqueness does not count. My intent is indeed another approach from that of traditional and classical christology. But: within this approach, both the canon

of Scripture and church tradition continue to be just as operative for me, since this historical study of Jesus is directed 'towards the Christian offer of an answer', as I just cited; therefore, the historical study itself cannot provide this answer.[10] Precisely because we still believe in the word of the apostolic witness from Scripture, via the whole of church tradition, a historical study of how this faith came into being certainly does have a special relevance for faith. Scripture and dogma can explain each other, whereas we on the other hand may not interpret how this Scripture came into being from the perspective of later dogma. I want to do 'history of dogma' in my historical study; in other words, along with my readers, to follow as it were the *itinerarium mentis* of the first disciples, who came in contact with someone of their own religion, followed him, and after his death confessed him as Christ and Son of God. Furthermore, when Christians confess that, in the life history of Jesus of Nazareth, God himself has accomplished decisive and definitive salvation for the liberation of human persons, then based on their own confession, the historical life history of this person may not vanish into thin air. Then it is precisely Jesus' prophetic activity which has to be set in relief, otherwise everything that is related about his death and resurrection becomes an abstract formalization. Because of this I [032] am interested, precisely from theological and pastoral motives, in the historically tangible earthly appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, even if this can only be made visible in a reflection, i.e. in its mirror image in the first faith community (I, 45).

Furthermore, the term 'the Jesus of history' is often brought into erroneous contrast with 'the Jesus of faith'. In similar cases, one does not make a similar contrast. For example, no Freudian or follower of Jung – who uses a specific interpretive framework or hypothetical theory, just as well as the faith-inspired Christian who takes God's acting in history as interpretive framework – would ever make a distinction between e.g. 'the historical Luther' and 'the Luther of the Freudian or Jungian interpretation': for them the historical Luther is this Freudian-interpreted Luther. In the same way, for the Christian, the Jesus of history *is* precisely the Jesus of faith. The statement of faith: 'Jesus is the Christ' implies the presumption that the Jesus of faith is the most adequate image of Jesus. In no way at all can one establish the Christian confession by historical criticism, but a historical-critical study from the perspective of a faith-inspired

[10] See I, 52-62, and especially II, 65-71. Canon and tradition were my guide, namely, as *that toward which* I *want to orient* my readers, and furthermore, step by step. To have misunderstood this explains the irresponsible criticism by W. Löser in *Theologie und Philosophie* 51, 1976, 257-266, not to mention the, from an academic standpoint, incomprehensible interpretation of my first Jesus book by L. Scheffczyk, 'Jesus für Philanthropen', in: *Theologisches* 77, 1976, 2080-2086; 78, 1976, 2097-2105; and 79, 1976, 2129-2132, taken from *Entscheidung* 69, 1976, II, 3ff.; translated into Italian under the title 'L'ultimo libro eretico di Schillebeeckx', in *Chiesa Viva* 6, 1976, n.59, 14-17; 7, 1976, n.60, 14-16; and 8, 1976, n .61, 19-21; even though this title may not be from the author himself, it does perfectly reflect the tone of the article itself.

intellectual curiosity does have something meaningful to say about this confession, not as revelation from God, but as specific interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth. Precisely there lies the theological significance of a historical study of Jesus from the perspective of the believer.

According to A. C. Danto,[11] and his interpreter H. M. Baumgartner,[12] history is 'a narrative ordering (or construction) of past events from the perspective of fundamental interests';[13] the historical narration at the same time describes and explains. This is how history is constructed through narration. This also becomes clear in the kerygmatic narrative of the Old and New Testaments. Each historical reconstruction is based on a 'perspective' and an interest. The faith-inspired perspective is one among many possibilities. I do not understand why the faith-inspired perspective would be 'less objective' or 'more subjective' than a historical reconstruction from other perspectives and interests, for example, 'profane'. The faith-inspired interpretation of Jesus (Jesus is the Christ) must certainly be a *plausible* interpretation, viewed against the background of a historical-critical reconstruction of Jesus' message and
[033] way of life, of his life and death. Within this perspective, the historical-critical study of Jesus is included in my first Jesus book; it is thus the perspective of a believer.

I explicitly state: 'In this approach the tradition of the church's account of Jesus is the presupposition for the discussion of the history of Jesus' (in a retrospective survey of I in II, namely: II, 23). However, this does not deny the modest but particular significance of a historical-critical reconstruction. The latter becomes even more important from the moment one maintains that Christianity is not a religion of a book, but is in essence a religious reference to a historical event and a historical person, Jesus of Nazareth; as well as from the moment the historical background of the New Testament became problematical for many people due to various types of literature. To continue serenely in such a problem situation, as those doing christology in the past did (given the conditions then: justifiably), is *a priori* to lose contact with modern readers and moreover to miss hitting upon any credible christology.

However, this in no way says that the historically reconstructed image of Jesus becomes the norm and criterion of Christian faith. This would plainly be an absurdity; the first Christians, indeed, were never confronted with this 'historical abstract', which is what a historical-critical image of Jesus is after all (I, 34f.). In this sense, there is a distinction between the 'Jesus of history', i.e. Jesus himself living in Palestine in contact with his contemporaries, and the

[11] A. C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History,* Cambridge 1965.
[12] H. M. Baumgartner, *Kontinuität und Geschichte. Zur Kritik und Metakritik der historischen Vernunft,* Frankfurt 1972. D. Mieth adds some important nuances to this instructive book, *Moral und Erfahrung. Beiträge zur theologisch-ethischen Hermeneutik,* Freiburg 1977, especially 67-72 and 97-100.
[13] Baumgartner, op. cit., see 249-294, esp. 282.

'historical Jesus', in the sense of the abstract result of a historical-critical study. In the historical-argumentative approach, a qualitative change takes places compared with the spontaneous, living story of Jesus through the ages (I, 34f.). It is not the historical image of Jesus, but the living Jesus of history who stands at the beginning and is the source, norm and criterion of what the first Christians interpretively experienced in him. But precisely in view of this structure of early Christian faith, a historical-critical study can clarify for us how the concrete content of the early Christian faith was 'filled in' by the Jesus of history. In this way, a historical reconstruction can give us a hand to join the first followers of Jesus in following their *itinerarium mentis,* from Jesus' baptism in the Jordan to his death and beyond. Then, in the course of this story, modern readers can also come to the discovery, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?' (Luke 24.32). Therefore it is a matter of [034] a *fides quaerens intellectum historicum* and at the same time of an *intellectus historicus quaerens fidem.* To call all this nineteenth-century liberal christology, or a christology for philanthropists, is to be willfully blind.

Within that context, I could nevertheless write: 'In faith, yet identifying myself with the doubts concerning the "Christ of the church", – which I have heard so sharply expressed all around me in the Netherlands and everywhere else – sometimes aggressively, sometimes regretfully, partly because people are existentially unable to believe as they once did – I have set out to search for "meta-dogmatic" clues. In the process I have moved through and beyond the church's dogma, although aware that this very dogma drove me to undertake my search, and I have persued the clues without knowing in advance where they would take me, without even knowing whether this line of attack would not in the end be bound to fail' (I, 34)! Some critics only seem to be fascinated by the term meta-dogmatic, forgetting the whole context in which this occurs in my first Jesus book. How can one do 'dogmatics' without 'dogma'? Put like that, this is indeed an intrinsic contradiction! But even a non-believer can give us a very good study of the history of dogma. Moreover, one could justifiably begin thematizing the dogma itself immediately. By contrast, I myself, in this 'unconventional christology' (I, 5), want to end with this (in a later third volume). I begin with a history of dogma prior to the New Testament and in the New Testament, using a historical study of Jesus as a help in this. An exegete such as A. Descamps calls this genetic process already a better approach than that of many exegetes (such as F. Hahn, V. Taylor, O. Cullmann, etc.) whom he regards as too systematic, in particular, too concentrated on the honorific christological titles.[14]

Furthermore, I had two basic outlooks in sight with this genetic process: on the one hand, there is a compelling need, at least for contemporary Western

[14] A. L. Descamps, 'Compte Rendu', in *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 6, 1975, (212-223) 216-217.

people, to look for an image of Jesus that stands up to every historical critique; and then, when in doubt, one may not appeal to the fundamental principle *in dubio pro tradito*, because that would counteract the seriousness of the open inquiry from the very beginning; which therefore means that sometimes – probably temporarily – one will have to regard concrete exegetical problems as undecided and therefore open. On the other hand, it was clear to me that every
[035] person in his irreducible uniqueness escapes scientific approach. In the face of the sum of all critical outcomes, there still remains a surplus of meaning: 'In the end another human being can only be recognized and acknowledged in a "disclosure" experience, an experience which for one person closes and for another discloses, whether on real, tried and tested grounds or not.' (I, 87f.) Confidence in a person, for which one nonetheless can offer good grounds (here too lies the importance of a historical study of Jesus), can never be completely rationalized; but even less can it be imposed by a command, especially in modern times. If one wants to be able to believe in Jesus unconditionally then, along with contemporary human experiences, it is necessary to have a Christian experience, using the 'hypothesis' of the church's proclamation as a divining rod (see chapter I above). It is precisely a historical dogmatic study of the emergence of that profession of faith which can make this 'hypothesis', offered to everyone, into a meaningful and gladly accepted hypothesis for possible experiences today. Some will call this 'apologetics'. Although I am of the opinion that we in no way have to be wary of apologetics, I myself see this 'roundabout way' (is it a 'roundabout way'?) as a pastoral mandate for contemporary 'dogmatic theology' which wants to reach people and not just academic 'insiders'. It is precisely the experience deficit in theology that I have tried to overcome in my two Jesus books; even though I call this only a beginning (prolegomena).

(ii) No preference for the Q *tradition nor any neglect of Johannine theology and the church's tradition*

1) I would like to make a clarification in advance regarding a general criticism by some exegetes. An exegete once told me, while a couple reviews run in the same direction, though a bit milder: you should have waited with such a theological project until the exegetes arrived at a general consensus. To this I can only respond that, under that condition, systematic theology would be put on half-pay until the end of time, or reduced to theological reflection on the post-biblical church tradition. Without any doubt, this latter is also an essential mandate for the theologian, but withdrawing the Bible from the theologian's field of study as long as the exegetes are not yet in agreement with one another does seem to me to suggest a bizarre conception of theology, and it only
[036] perpetuates the fatal rupture between exegesis and dogmatics. Furthermore,

the presupposition that a time will ever come when the exegetical literary arsenal is exhausted and the exegetical work is once and for all concluded, seems to me to be a hermeneutic and literary-critical misunderstanding of the possibility of open-ended 're-reading' of once-written texts. The consequence of this is that every systematic theology, as a thematizing undertaking, is also temporary, fundamentally just as unaccomplishable as the explanation of texts whose story is passed down, always 'new', as a transformation of the same old story. All of this does not do away with the fact that in every time, coming from a limited situation, one can, may and even must say what one in fact has to say, even though it be partly based on material which is partially of a hypothetical nature. Transhistorical theology stripped of time is simply not possible. Patristic theology with its often brilliant allegorical exegesis, which however does not take seriously what every exegete now regards as a sacred duty, has nonetheless in its time fruitfully mediated the Christian faith. This certainly does point to the relativity and historical conditioning of the authentic mediation of the Christian faith over the course of time (see I, 39f.); it does not relieve us of the task of now being an element of mediation along with them.

2) I myself already called it hermeneutically self-evident that, in an attempt to give a contemporary title to Jesus – 'Who do *you* say that I am?' – one cannot jump directly from the New Testament to the present day, neglecting all the intermediary church tradition (I, 34f. and 39f.). I also said that it is true that the point of departure for all christology is the appearance of the person Jesus in our history, but then not without his prehistory (the 'Old Testament') nor without his posthistory (namely, the entire life of the church) (I, 44f.). This clearly affirms the necessary mediation of the church's Christian tradition in principle. There is not the slightest ground in either of my two Jesus books for claiming that I would subsequently deny the significance of canon and tradition for Christian theologizing, as W. Löser does claim.[15] People seem to forget that different 'literary genres' are also possible in theologizing, and then judge others according to their own literary genre, – a 'theology from above'. Why should a 'theology from below' have to include the negation of the theological significance of canon and tradition? [037]

The question, however, is whether all the material from the preceding study should *per se* be incorporated in the final edition of a book. I myself explicitly said that the patristic, conciliar, Carolingian, nominalist and post-Tridentine christologies (I, 35), to which I had previously devoted classes and lectures, have contributed to guiding me during the writing of my first Jesus book.

Then the reproach by a reviewer, that a contemporary christology written

[15] See W. Löser, *Theologie und Philosophie* 51, 1976, 263.

exclusively from the perspective of the New Testament, neglecting the great tradition of the church, inevitably leads to short-circuiting,[16] may be true; however the reproach does not apply to my two Jesus books. A Lutheran theologian understood this better than my Catholic colleague, when he wrote in his review, 'The dogmatic theologian is always present; this is the only way in which he can survey and arrange the mass of material'.[17] By the way, if I had inserted all this material into my two books, then (apart from the monstrosity of such a publication), it would have clearly appeared that time and time again in the history of the Christian tradition, we are confronted with the four structural principles (II, 631-46) which I was able to distil from the New Testament, precisely because of the method which I followed in my two Jesus books – sometimes with differences in accent. The method which I followed is therefore also a service to the continuing church tradition, a service of which a 'repetitive' theology often loses sight. From the explicit insertion of the material from the studies of church tradition, which for the most part are available in existing literature, it would also clearly appear how there are indeed Christian heights and depths in the history of Christian spirituality, proportionate to the extent to which certain of these cited new Testament structural principles sometimes recede completely into the background; and how nonetheless, continuity is visible in the great Christian tradition despite or precisely within the nonetheless continuing tradition of Christian experience. From that, it would also appear that the structure of the process of attributing titles to Jesus in the New Testament, with its intrinsic tension between the element of projection (Jesus Christ; Jesus Logos; Jesus Orpheus; Jesus, Light from Light; Jesus, true God and true man; Sacred Heart of Jesus; Christ the
[038] King; etc.) and those elements originating in what Jesus himself was historically, which 'impose' themselves and 'cling' to it, are found time and time again within the authentic Christian tradition; while that tension or critical correction was missing, or not made sufficiently clear to contemporaries, in those currents within Christianity which are termed heretical.

It should also become clear from this that certain titles given to Jesus, stemming from contemporary experiences which have not been critically reflected upon (e.g. a specifically twentieth-century spirituality of 'Christ the King'), die out liturgically after a short time and vanish into thin air.

One can objectively argue that, in point of fact, all of this has not been apparent because that material was left out! Of course. But in any case, that was not my objective with those two Jesus books. Those books certainly do make it clear that their entire objective was to bring present-day believers-in-

[16] Löser, op. cit., 263-264.
[17] W. Dantine, in *Lutherische Monatshefte* 4, 5, 1976, 212.

crisis, gradually and in stages, to the faith of the great Christian tradition which arose out of the Old and New Testaments. Research into the history of the origins of the Christian faith seemed to be precisely the best approach, because that was the point which disturbed Christians the most in secular literature. Various signs (especially letters) from lay persons in theology who have no objections to classical theological writings and the theological development since the nineteenth century, make it apparent that precisely this method seems to have caught on, to the benefit of a newly discovered and unabridged Christian faith. Disturbance arose only when some clergy, who knew and wanted only the 'classical genre', dropped the word 'heretic' left and right. Christians are too little aware of the pluralism which can already be found in the New Testament, to which the two books limit themselves. Insight into this is liberating in a Christian way because it takes away the impression to which many modern Christians object, as if everything 'just fell out of heaven'. To make it clear that precisely that which is 'from above' manifests itself in a very human process of experience and interpretation, seems to me to be a better initiation into the faith-inspired acceptance that everything is under the direction of God's Spirit, than 'Denzinger theology' might be. Furthermore, the religious situation of worship, Christianity and the world does not so immediately demand to know everything which quantitatively 'is to be believed by Christians', while it certainly does demand a qualitative concentration on what God really intends for us in and through Jesus Christ. As Vatican II said in the decree on ecumenism, ultimately there is also a 'hierarchia veritatum' and therefore a key message. To bring people, even believers-in-crisis, to say 'yes' to that key message is more than a theologian can wish for. From many thank-you letters, I know that this is the case. [039]

However, this little *interim* may not divert us from the real question, as to whether pastoral intentions, unintentional it is true, nonetheless made the presentation of the authentic Christian faith erroneous. That is why I cannot stop here, but must further develop the hermeneutical principles of my two Jesus books, first of all taking a careful look at the objections and criticism of my colleagues with regard to my use of exegesis.

3) A frequently recurring reproach has to do with my so-called partiality towards the Q tradition. My first response to this is plain and simple: this is not what it seems to be. There is no question of 'partiality'. But whoever is seeking the oldest accessible Christian images of Jesus does have to make consistent use of those methods which can bring him to that goal. Well then, the first to be considered are the Gospel of Mark and the tradition used in common by Matthew and Luke: the so-called Q tradition, besides a tradition proper to Matthew and Luke, and some traditions in the Gospel of John, as well as the

ancient christological hymns and Paul's credal citation (I Cor. 15.3-5) (which are analyzed at some length in my first Jesus book anyway). The role which the Q tradition plays, at least in my first Jesus book (while it almost completely disappears in the second book), is therefore in both cases the consistent result of what is being sought in that first book and what the second book is seeking. One judges an author at the level on which a book or a particular section of that book belongs: historically for a historical section, theologically for a theological section. This has nothing to do with personal partiality. Precisely such a historical study can then stumble upon a result which becomes relevant for theology or the history of dogma. In my opinion, this is precisely the case with the Q tradition; and as an incipient tradition with a very unique
[040] countenance, it therefore receives my full theological interest in my first Jesus book.

Precisely because I am looking for the specific features of Jesus' ministry, I often speak of 'overpainting by the church', a term which is immediately interpreted by some critics, unjustly, as 'therefore not historical' or 'therefore, not true'. In any case, these conclusions are not mine. Ultimately, overpainting is the same as updating; for example, a word which Jesus spoke in a particular situation is later used in the New Testament as a saying of Jesus in another, namely ecclesiastical, situation in which that word demonstrates precisely its fruitfulness. Ultimately every good preacher does this when he speaks about Jesus to a modern audience. When I often do speak of 'overpainting' in the New Testament, and by no means unfavourably, it is only within those sections, primarily in my first Jesus book, in which the unique and potentially ascertainable situation in which Jesus first spoke this word is being sought. Only then I am not searching for the fruitfulness of this word for the Christian life of later generations, but rather for the original context in which Jesus made this statement, even if we often do not get any further than the insight into how Mark, how the Q tradition and Matthew and Luke applied this word to their concrete situations. Therefore 'overpainting' is a term which only functions meaningfully within a project in which one is looking for what I called historical 'Jesus authenticity'. On the other hand, precisely in these so-called overpaintings by the church, we find the model for how we can make Jesus' words and deeds fruitful in our other situations. The scornful criticism of the word 'overpainting' is therefore completely misplaced.

I do know that all kinds of real questions concerning the Q tradition exist. The most pertinent have been formulated by a dogmatic theologian, P. Schoonenberg, and an exegete, A. L. Descamps.[18] Their criticism concerns two points: (*a*) the Q tradition reconstructed by scholars contains no proclamation

[18] P. Schoonenberg, 'Schillebeeckx en de exegese', *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 15, 1975, 255-268; A. L. Descamps, 'Compte Rendu', *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 6, 1975, 212-223.

of suffering, death and resurrection; but then the critical question is whether the actual Q tradition did not presuppose this; *(b)* to infer a Q community from [041] the Q tradition remains problematic, and furthermore, it is superfluous.[19]

These are clear questions, even though as such they seem to me to be *a priori* and abstract, i.e. independent of highly specific concrete data within which abstract potential questions appear to be either meaningful indeed or 'irrelevant'. The Q tradition is merely an academic hypothesis which bears fruit, while many other hypotheses 'don't work' at the moment. Epistemologically, this is more than one can desire.[20] In this Q tradition, which is reconstructed by scholars, there is no mention of soteriology of the cross or resurrection christology; parousia christology is mentioned. Schoonenberg agrees with me in all this, but he asks if the 'argument from silence' used there is not problematic. However I wonder (along with many exegetes for that matter) whether this argument from silence can be validly brought up here. After all, no trace of the so-called *real* Q tradition can be found in the synoptic accounts of the passion and the appearances, while Matthew and Luke obviously used, not the Q tradition recontructed by exegetes, but the real Q tradition! So where is the 'silence'? This indicates that in the real Q tradition there was no explicit mention of soteriology of the cross or resurrection christology.

The question does remain though: within communities, is it not possible that this Q tradition functioned alongside a christological proclamation that was more directly soteriological and concerned with Easter, which came to the fore within those same communities on other occasions? This is a meaningful possibility in the abstract. This brings us to the second objection, the unnecessary and problematic leap I make from the Q tradition to a Q community with its own christology, markedly concerned with the parousia. In my opinion, *a priori* conceptions can begin to play a role here. Schoonenberg and Descamps seem to think from the standpoint, current especially since Bultmann and Käsemann, that there was one single early kerygma, namely of the resurrection, from which divergent developments then followed; as well as from the earlier premise advocated by T. W. Manson that the 'logia' were something like 'a manual of instructions in the duties of Christian life', part therefore of a 'christological tradition' about the resurrection, alive elsewhere [042] in the same community. Precisely this view has been refuted since H. Tödt and most of the Q researchers since then. Q is a tradition with very specific dogmatic purposes of a theological and christological nature; it provides no

[19] Schoonenberg, op. cit., 256-259; Descamps, op. cit., 219.

[20] A very careful, critical and brief representation of the present state of the Q problem (however without mention of the question of a Q community) has since been given by M. Devisch, 'La source dite des Logia et ses problèmes', in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 51, 1975, 82-89. Now see also A. Polag, *Die Christologie der Logienquelle,* Neukirchen-Vluyn 1977.

explicit resurrection christology, but it does give a quite focused and complete parousia christology, in spite of many uncertainties concerning the extent of this pre-canonical stratum of tradition. Based on studies especially by D. Lührmann, H. E. Tödt and many others, I have fundamentally come to doubt precisely these two premises, which do indeed make critical questions understandable and at the same time render the (hypo)thesis of a Q *community* superfluous. Especially helpful to me were the detailed studies by James Robinson and Helmut Koester, who refuse to treat the early Christian literature critically on the basis of the concept of canon, which in Christanity is certainly justified. They see then continuous strata of tradition between pre-canonical and post-canonical literature until the third century, in pre-Nicene Christianity. By means of this approach it has become clear to me that narrowly defined traditions require specific tradition bearers, with their own social, cultural and religious premises. In spite of fundamental differences which manifest themselves in the course of history, one can nonetheless draw a line from Q via Matthew to the Gospel of Thomas and the Acts of Thomas, of which the latter two do indeed reveal something like surviving Q communities, albeit further evolved.

Schoonenberg also points out that some texts in Paul and Acts only make mention of a parousia christology (e.g. Acts 2.36; I Cor. 11.26), whereas everyone knows that elsewhere in these writings there is also mention of a paschal christology. However, no one will deny that in the Christianity of the New Testament the proclamation of both cross and resurrection forms an inseparable unity, and that nonetheless and precisely therefore Paul, for example, speaks exclusively about the saving death of Jesus at one moment without mentioning the resurrection, and then again elsewhere seems to see salvation only in the resurrection, without mentioning the death of Jesus (e.g. I Cor. 1.17-2.5 as compared with I Cor. 15.12-19; also in the Deutero-Pauline epistles, e.g. Eph. 1.17-2.10 as compared with Eph. 2.11-22). Here one certainly cannot appeal to an argument from silence. But this simply reflects the
[043] situation of the canonical scripture. However, at the level of its origins, and therefore still independent of its canonical recognition, this assumes a whole process by means of which a common consciousness is gradually growing in the church from widespread Christian backgrounds, – the 'tunnel' between Jesus' death and the phase of the formation of scripture. In this tunnel period, the 'Easter experience' common to all the traditions is in fact divergently interpreted, and in any case not *per se* in the form of the Pauline resurrection kerygma, at least according to the more or less high probability of the relevant historical reconstructions.

Owing to all this, there is critically *more* basis for the presumption (and I do not claim more than this) that the starting point of the New Testament is a

pluralism of Christian traditions and perhaps even of communities with their own complete, albeit 'open' christologies, than for the assumption that initially there was one single Christian community (e.g. that of Jerusalem) which already had the 'canonical resurrection creed' from the very beginning.[21] So an argument supporting this was in no way the reasoning that the difference between parousia christology and paschal christology would be so great that two groups of communities would *have* to be considered as their respective tradition bearers. I reject precisely this argument; I explicitly say that whenever these Christian traditions or groups come in contact with each other or with differently oriented traditions or communities, with an explicit resurrection kerygma, in this contact they have ultimately been able to experience an explicitation of their own faith, easily and spontaneously (I, 395ff.). However, from the existence of communities which bear all the characteristics of the Q christology until a much later date, it appears that not all were able to do this. Are these communities which later separated from the orthodox great church? Or rather is it not more probable that pre-canonical christologies, born by groups of Christians, simply continued in existence even after the general *regula fidei* began to take shape in the church? It is true that the historical evidence for this is scarce; for we ultimately know little of all the originally East Syrian Christianity with – as far as we do know anything about it – recognizable Q characteristics, as well as of the early Egyptian Christianity, not mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. But the existing data about this living Christianity points more in the direction of the hypothesis of a specific [044] community theology with a strongly Jewish slant, completely dominated by

[21] Unfortunately, the examples which Schoonenberg cites to negate a Q *community* are in no sense appropriate. The fact that Paul, including the Deutero-Paulines, sometimes proclaims the death of the Lord without mentioning the resurrection, which *he* does, however, confess without any doubt, seems to me no counterargument because usually this concerns texts cited by him (taken from a liturgical context for the most part), which are naturally included *by Paul* in his paschal christology. But this still in no way demonstrates that they had been integrated in the same manner in their original non-Pauline context. Pauline insertion or retouching of such texts cited by Paul, often point in the opposite direction. Also one may not proceed from the presupposition that the theology of the Lord's Supper was the same in all early Christian communities. Then one is already presupposing a *regula fidei* which was however still 'in the making.' The difficulties surrounding the question whether or not to accept the canonicity of some New Testament writings reveal the unique theological characteristics of many communities, still in the post-apostolic period, which also has to do with their geographical, sociocultural background. Of course, all of this in no way excludes theological developments, even within one and the same community. – In fact, the relationship between exaltation and resurrection is also very complex historically (see I, 537, n.51 [Collected Works n.13]); but, on the other hand, the claim that the idea of the resurrection must be the basis of the exaltation, and that the latter must imply the former (as J. Lambrecht does, 'De oudste christologie: verrijzenis of verhoging?', in *Bijdragen* 36, 1975, 118-144) betrays more a specifically systematic christological mindset (typical of this in Lambrecht is the insertion of 'at least logically' on p. 138) than a purely exegetical historical reconstruction: then one reasons from the paschal concept which had become canonical or from specific dogmatic presuppositions. And the question is precisely: what is intended, time and time again, concretely, in the pre-canonical traditions, with real Easter experience.

the coming of the kingdom of God with Jesus' parousia. Egyptian Christianity's still existing resentment about the New Testament's silence about their ancient Christian tradition is quite clear!

Up to a point I can agree with the additional assertion that the omission of the question about the bearers of the Q tradition (therefore the question about Q communities) makes no difference for systematic theology. Relating to content, this indeed makes little difference. However, the question is by no means superfluous. For the answer to it provides us with a cross-section, in terms of the history of dogma, of the origins of the early Christian resurrection kerygma. Then the early Christian interpretations of Jesus do not always appear to have been a purely immanent development within one community; more precisely, from the beginning they also appear to have included a mutual exchange or evangelical criticism between the different communities. Systematically, this historical reconstruction of dogma, in all its exegetical relativity, helps us better understand the significance of the one Church and the many local Churches. I see an 'ecumenical' principle at work in this development (see I, [059], nt 6), and this certainly is systematically relevant.

I would call W. Löser's criticism of the purpose of my use of the Q tradition science fiction. According to this reviewer, I would give the Q tradition and the pre-Marcan tradition, in other words, all the pre-synoptic material, priority over later currents, in order to relativize resurrection christology.[22] I will explicitly go into this below, in the discussion of paschal christology. Here I can already say that, throughout my first Jesus book, I precisely want to integrate the paschal christology into Jesus' message, life and praxis or way of life, because otherwise a paschal christology becomes a 'formalized' kerygma with no basis in Jesus' life. Throughout the whole of the New Testament, the paschal christology is predicated of the 'eschatological prophet' Jesus, and not of a Mr X. Therein lies the acknowledgement that the first Christian
[045] interpretations of Jesus were Jewish (Jewish-Christian) interpretations instead of a re-Judaizing of Jesus at the cost of the Christian kerygma, interpretations made by people who were not only dramatically confronted with Jesus' execution, but who were also intensely fascinated by his message, his entire behaviour and way of life. Here we find traditions which pass on to us memories of Jesus' life in Palestine. In no sense does this imply a prejudice against the later development of dogma in the pre-New Testamental and New Testamental christologies. I myself say repeatedly that no final verdict can be passed regarding Jesus before his death. Rather, one could assert that certain reviewers show evidence of a prejudice against early Jewish-Christian interpretations of Jesus. In those sections of my first Jesus book to which this criticism is relevant, I am not giving the (ever provisional) final state of the

[22] W. Löser, op cit., *Theologie und Philosophie* 51, 1976, 263.

christology, but I am tracing stages in the history of dogma. Even the fact that the creed which Paul cites in I Cor. 15.3-5 is older than, for example, the Q tradition, does not yet mean that the whole of Pauline christology would already be present in this old pre-Pauline creed and, furthermore, that it would already apply to all Christians.

4) Finally, various reviewers reproach me for showing skepticism, under the influence of German exegesis, regarding the historicity of the Gospel of John, so that my historical image of Jesus ends up being one-sidely synoptic. I do have to admit this in part; for another part, this criticism is based, in my opinion, on a misunderstanding.

It is true indeed that I did not know the Gospel of John well enough when writing my first Jesus book. I only made a study of it in preparation for my second Jesus book. Proceeding from this study I would indeed be able to fill out the historical image of Jesus in my first Jesus book, even though this would not alter its basic lines. On the other hand, when planning my original two Jesus books (I only realized while writing the second book that it would have to become a trilogy), I reserved the study of New Testamental christology (apart, therefore, from what had already happened before the New Testamental period) primarily for my second book. Thus one cannot reproach the first volume for not having treated what will be discussed in the second book. However, this criticism is also partly based on a misunderstanding. Detailed studies, above all by James Robinson, had previously already unmasked the one-sidedness of a purely synoptic study of Jesus, especially in German exegesis. In his 'Jesus book' H. Braun had said, 'For an inquiry into the [046] historical Jesus, the fourth gospel, John, is dropped completely.'[23] His motivation was: this gospel is completely un-Jewish, un-Palestinian, and of Hellenistic Eastern origin. This vision of the Gospel of John has been fundamentally shaken, especially in the Anglo-Saxon exegesis of the last ten years. From my second Jesus book in particular, it is apparent that it is clear to me that the Gospel of John has no other structure than the synoptic gospels: like these latter, it processes historical memories of Jesus in a kerygmatic way. John certainly does rely on older traditions, even of Palestinian origin, with an historical interest for specific facets of Jesus' life, and especially for their geographical setting, that is perhaps of a different nature but is nonetheless his own. That is why, already in my first Jesus book, I considered the Gospel of John to be on equal footing with the first three gospels as a source of historical knowledge about Jesus, even though at that time I did not yet know that this gospel is even more reliable historically than the synoptics for some facets of Jesus' life. 'The two gospel streams become mutually enlightening and the cleft

[23] H. Braun, *Jesus,* Stuttgart-Berlin [2]1969, 30.

between the synoptics and John is bridged,'[24] and thus 'the "synoptic problem" needs to be recast in terms of a "gospels problem"'[25]: these words of James Robinson were already clearly in my mind in the first Jesus book. Therefore I have to reject a criticism which wants to push me in the direction of Herbert Braun in this matter. The fundamental presumption for the general historicity of the gospels, which I too do not defend *a priori*[26] but rather *a posteriori* (I, 71f. and 82-85), applies then to the four gospels and not just to the synoptics. It was precisely the Gospel of John which made a considerable contribution towards the acceptance of this presumption (see I, 46-100, concerning 'Pneuma and anamnesis').

Although I certainly reject the accusation of skepticism regarding the historicity of the Gospel of John, there is on the other hand a grain of truth in the one-sided German interpretation of Jesus based on the synoptics: and this is precisely where the misunderstanding by my critics originates. In contrast to the synoptics, there is little or no comparative material present for many details in John; because of this, it becomes more difficult in practice with
[047] regard to details to determine whether this or that item in John is in fact historical. Thus it is perfectly consistent on the one hand, as a first principle, to declare that John is of equal value with the synoptics in terms of historical information, and on the other hand, in practice, not to be able to pass historical judgment on many details in John. This is simply the poverty of the historical method, however efficient it also is. So I say that the mention that Jesus also baptized, found only in John, may well be historical, but how can you make the factuality of this assertion hard and fast historically? You can only leave it open. By not appealing to John in many points of detail I have indeed just wanted to leave all kinds of details open. Anyway, one cannot accept them *a priori* as historical when this is impossible on the basis of historical criteria, for then one simply begins to 'pretend'. What B. van Iersel says applies here in the fullest sense: a presumption in favour of general historicity makes no decision about details unless one accepts the historical burden of proof for them.[27] With John too, a great deal certainly can be attained based on the principle of consistency. And so I have made use of it a great deal, e.g. in connection with the eschatological messenger and prophet in John (I, 478f. and 494f.), precisely because adequate material is present here in Johannine or pre-Johannine categories which is comparable with the synoptics. More than likely there is

[24] J. M. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity,* Philadelphia 1971, 267.
[25] Ibid., 238.
[26] If I say in I, 83, that 'in contrast to what many form critics usually accept as evident, the presumption does not plead *against* but rather *for* the 'historical' interest of the early Christian traditions in Jesus,' then this is not an *a priori* judgment, not a point of departure, but rather a result of research.
[27] B. van Iersel, 'Onontbeerlijke prolegomena tot een verhaal over Jezus', in: *Kosmos en Oecumene* 7, 1974, (174-179) 176.

still more historically to draw out from John (as from the synoptics also, for that matter) than has been done by me; I will concede that. But I consider the reproach of skepticism on my part to be groundless.

The unavoidable relativity of the nonetheless valid historical method also has the result that I, on the one hand, can assert in principle that what is 'secondary' or 'redactional' for a specific witness, e.g. Mark, nonetheless can be an authentic mark of Jesus for the communities as a whole with their differently oriented interest, while, on the other hand, I do not give much evidence of the actual application of this principle in the details (Schoonenberg's criticism).[28] Yet this too is no inconsistency, but just a result of the corollary of the principle that one has to accept the historical burden of proof. Historically, there was more going on in the Jesus event than we can 'make hard and fast' historically. So naturally every historical reconstruction does give a somewhat mutilated image, but nonetheless this is really amply sufficient to be able to call the faith-inspired tradition a particular experience and interpretation of reality which is meaningful and reliable, and before the [048] forum of critical thinking as well – and also sufficient to sketch Jesus' relation to the kingdom of God, sufficient even to make Jesus' *religious* proclamation, critical of the world and society, and his way of life plausible as historical data.

(iii) Gains resulting from the acknowledgment of the theological relevance of a historical study of Jesus

One of the results of the historical question about Jesus, raised out of theological interest, has been the theological revaluation of Jesus' prophetic ministry, of his message and consistent praxis, which moreover prevented that Jesus' death and resurrection became formalized in a kerygmatic way. This is another accent, compared with earlier work on christology, which was almost exclusively concentrated on Jesus' death and resurrection and on the hypostatic union, and which for that matter is in contrast to the older christology, e.g. of Thomas Aquinas, who devotes the major part of his christology, albeit with a medieval interest, to the *mysteria carnis Christi,* i.e. to the Jesus' entire life: his baptism, message and praxis.[29] In this theological revaluation, Jesus' death and resurrection are more closely related, while his

[28] P. Schoonenberg, op. cit., 'Schillebeeckx en de exegese'. Unfortunately, Schoonenberg has an example of that which is just not valid, because I am arguing that the secondary text mentioned is authentically Jesus. In I, 308f., I say that Mark 14.25b (the second clause, 'until . . .') is secondary. According to my statement of principles, this does not mean: therefore not 'authentically Jesus'. I explicitly proposed: 'the second clause "until …." is of a different origin: there is also mention of the eschatological banquet elsewhere' (op. cit., I, 309: which was analysed in I, 307f, see I, 307 n. 95 and I, 206-218). In other words, the second clause 'until . . .' is also authentically Jesus; therefore ultimately what I am saying is that *only 'the combination'* (I, 309) of two authentically Jesus items is secondary.

[29] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 30-59.

death is also seen as an implication of the unconditional nature of his whole ministry: of his message, parables and praxis (II, 793-802). This then means that the whole of early Christianity, and not just Paulinism or Johannism, is taken completely seriously, and precisely because of this, Paulinism and Johannism for example are put in sharper relief. For Paul and Paulinism, Jesus' death is indeed the resume of Jesus' message and praxis. However, why this is so only becomes fully evident thanks to the method followed in those two Jesus books, in which – and then primarily in the first one – a reconstruction of the 'Jesus of history' as well as of the earliest Christian titles, so difficult to separate from him (such as, for example, the 'eschatological prophet', see below), do indeed play a major role, in contrast to what even progressive, 'classical christologies' have shown and show.

Moreover, precisely this methodological approach clarifies why a historical image of Jesus remains incomplete as long as the historical circumstances of Jesus' execution, and thus the intrinsic connection between his death and his
[049] message and entire ministry, remain obscure (I, 294-318; II, 793-802). The fact that the disciples were so severely depressed and shattered by Jesus' death is historically the best evidence for how high the disciples' expectations regarding Jesus were, even before his death. Their desperation itself already presupposes an initial and even pronounced identification of the person of Jresus before his death, when all appeared to be lost, when all hope for Israel was gone: 'we had hoped that he [= 'Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word', Luke 24.19b] was the one to redeem Israel' (Luke 24.21). Although Luke's formulation can be partially influenced by the 'later' confession of Christ, nonetheless it makes clear that even before the Easter event the disciples cherished extremely high expectations regarding Jesus – which on the other hand are also confirmed by the fact that opponents of Jesus wanted to do away with him. In my opinion, these pre-Easter suspicions tended towards the 'intertestamental' concept of the eschatological prophet-like-Moses, greater-than-Moses (see below, chapter V a).

Chapter 4

CONTEMPORARY WAYS OF NAMING JESUS: LIVING TRADITION THANKS TO RENEWED EXPERIENCE

What was experience for others yesterday is tradition for us today; and what is experience for us today will again be tradition for others tomorrow. But what once was experience can only be handed down, at least as living tradition, in and through renewed experiences (II, 30-64). Without continually renewed experience, a rupture comes into existence between the level of experience of ongoing life and the expression of earlier experiences, a rupture between experience and doctrine and between people and church. This already means that Christianity is not a message which has to be believed, but rather an *experience of faith which becomes message* and, as lived message, wants to offer a new and experiential possibility of life to others who hear of it within their own life experience.

(a) Critical correlation between then and today

The third hinge on which these two Jesus books turn has to do with the *critical* correlation between the two sources of theology, which were discussed above: on the one hand, the Christian tradition of experience; and on the other hand, present-day experiences.

From the above it has already been demonstrated that we cannot simply accept all the explanations of Jesus' salvific significance just as they have been handed down. On the other hand, neither is there any such thing as the salvific significance of Jesus 'in itself', a sort of timeless, suprahistorical, abstract datum. And finally, neither can we as Christians arbitrarily make something out of Jesus or just see in him a 'chiffre', a figure onto whom we can project our own human experiences. Rather, it has to do with a critical correlation in which [051] we attune our belief and action in the world in which we live, here and now, to

what is brought up for discussion in the biblical tradition. This correlation, therefore, demands: 1) an analysis of our present-day world of experience; 2) a tracking down of the constant structures of the fundamental Christian experience about which the New Testament and the further Christian experiential tradition speak, and 3) the critical correlation of these two 'sources'. For these biblical elements should be able to serve Christians by structuring their present-day experiences just as they also gave structure to the unique world in which the various biblical authors lived. Only then is there continuity in the Christian tradition. Therefore this continuity also requires attention for a shift in the horizons within which questions are posed.

(i) Structural principles

When we have charted the divergent explanations of the New Testament, it becomes possible to compare these with each other and to look for constant structures which we find recurring in each of the New Testamental writings and which connect the divergent explanations. Via this variously interpreted but nonetheless one and the same basic experience, points of juncture then become transparent, structural elements which have given structure to the one New Testamental experience. Our present-day manner of faith-inspired thinking, living and Christian action should then be structured by these same elements, if what we believe and do is going to be able to claim to be *Christian,* albeit within this other world in which we live, which does differ from that of New Testamental Christianity.

The following are four formative principles, stemming from one and the same basic experience, which nonetheless intrinsically connect the divergent explanations of the New Testament in all their differences, and which clearly stand out by mutual comparison (II, 631-44):

1. A basic *theological* and *anthropological* principle: the belief that God wants to be salvation by and for human persons and wants to realize this via our history, in the midst of meaninglessness in search of meaning; thus finding salvation in God coincides with the human person's coming to himself: to find salvation in God is at the same time to come to terms with oneself;

[052] 2. *Christological* mediation: the belief that it is precisely Jesus of Nazareth who perfectly and definitively discloses why God began doing what he is doing and therefore why the human person as well really has to do what he has to do;

3. *Ecclesiological* story and praxis*:* the belief that this story of God in Jesus is handed down in order to involve us in it too: we ourselves can and may follow Jesus and thus write our own chapter within this living ongoing story of Jesus;

4. *Eschatological* consummation: the belief that this story cannot reach its consummation within the earthly order of our history and therefore knows an

eschatological dénouement, for which the limits of our history are too narrow; consequently, belief in the 'now already' and the 'not yet'.

Within diverse questions and problems, the different New Testamental authors are doing nothing other than time and again giving these four elements of the basic story another setting and, as it were, recomposing without being unfaithful to the basic story. Here I want to analyse the first three principles more closely (the fourth element concludes this analysis at a later stage).

1. The Christian experience gained from Jesus of Nazareth by a group of people of Jewish origin who were initially called 'Christians' only by outsiders, grew into the confession that, for these people, provided a positive and unique 'answer', surpassing all expectations, to the painful and humanly insoluble question of the why and the meaning of life as a human person in nature and history, within a context of meaning and meaninglessness, of suffering and moments of joy: God himself stands surety so that human life might receive a positive-meaningful significance. He himself has risked his own honour: this honour is his identification with the outcast, with the exploited, with the enslaved, above all with sinners, i.e. those who offend their fellow men and God himself to such an extent that their offending 'cries out to heaven' (see Ex. 2.23-25; 3.7-8). Then 'God comes down' (Ex. 3.8): 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish' (John 3.16). Ultimately – and this is at the same time 'from the beginning' – God decides about the meaning and destiny of man and indeed only for the benefit of men and women. He does not leave this decision to the ebb and flow of cosmic and historical, chaotic and demonic powers, with whose crooked [053] lines he knows how to write straight and, in particular, whose crooked lines he wants to straighten out. As creator, God is the promoter of good and the opponent of evil, suffering and injustice, things which hurl men into meaninglessness. Jesus' followers experience salvation from God in their encounter with him in their experience of meaning, relish and fulfillment in life. As God's initiative which surpasses all imagined expectations, this destiny is experienced as unmerited gift: grace. Herein the Old and New Testaments are on one wavelength: Yahweh is a God of men and women, he is 'I am' (Ex. 3.14), that is, 'I care about you' (Ex. 3.16). God's name is: 'solidarity with my people'. God's own honour is in the happiness and welfare, the salvation of the human persons who themselves find their happiness in God. God's predestination and people's experience of meaning and relish in life are two aspects of one and the same salvific reality. Thus the critical correlation between religion and human experience already appears in Scripture. Salvation from God has to do with human wholeness and happiness, and in essence this is correlated with the solidarity of man with the living God, concerned for mankind.

2. The meaning or destiny of man, already prepared and intended by God from of old, is disclosed in the person, the course of life and the destiny of Jesus of Nazareth, and thus made knowable in an experience of believers: in Jesus' message and life, his praxis and the concrete circumstances in which he was executed. Such a life and death has value in and of itself, and not just because of a subsequent ratification or endorsement, by whoever. But precisely for this reason, this has value primarily for God, who acknowledges his own solidarity with his people, his own name in this, and then identifies himself not only with the ideals and visions of Jesus but also with his very person; in this way Jesus' destiny beyond death is fulfilled in his resurrection from the dead, God's amen to Jesus' person and his entire life's work, at the same time a divine affirmation of his own being, 'solidarity with the people'; 'God is love' (I John 4.8; 4.16). God may have many names in the life of religious mankind,
[054] but for Christians he shows his true face in the disinterested partiality of Jesus Christ as good shepherd in search of the lost, foolish and outcast sheep.

In Jesus, God's purpose with man as well as the meaning of human life is fully portrayed: promotion of the good, opposition to all evil. That is why his fate was under God's special care. He is the uniquely beloved of God as gift to mankind. The course of his life is the fulfillment and elaboration of the divine care for human persons, in and through the free and responsible, human and religious initiative of Jesus himself, in the conflict and opposition which were concretely aroused by his action as advocate of man's cause as being God's cause. In this he is a representative symbol of the issues of human life and of God's ultimate will for salvation.

3. In line with biblical 'remembrance', the remembrance of the story of God with man in Jesus is not just a remembering of what took place earlier. It is narratively reaching back into the past with an eye to acting in the present for a liberated future. God 'remembers' his earlier saving deeds in and through the introduction of new deeds of liberation. So Christian faith is a remembrance of the life and death of the risen Jesus by means of an acting that copies Jesus – not by imitating what he did, but, like Jesus, by responding to one's own new situations, from an intense experience of God. Christian life itself can and must be a remembrance of Jesus Christ. The orthodox confession is simply the expression of true Christian life as a 'remembrance of Jesus'. Detached from this way of life in accordance with the kingdom of God, the Christian confession is innocuous and *a priori* implausible. The living community is the only authentic relic of Jesus. Thus the Christian works, in freedom and responsibly, on the consummation of God's project of providing ultimate meaning. In this, the correlation between God's universal will for salvation in Jesus, and human well-being and happiness for each and every one, is realized.

Ultimately we can only speak about the story of Jesus – the first source of theology – in terms of the story of the Christian community which lives in the experiences of our time — the second source of theology. So resurrection, the formation of community and the improvement of the world, in accordance with the praxis of the kingdom of God form a single event: with a spiritual and a historic side. But what are *our* modern experiences? [055]

(ii) The modern experience of life and its Christian structure

It is only when we look for the tenor of our contemporary experiences, problems and questions against the background of these four structural principles, that Christians are able to say in faith, in a critical correlation which is creative and nonetheless faithful to the gospel, how they experience salvation from God in Jesus today. Contemporary new experiences have a hermeneutical significance, for the content of our own Christian experience and knowledge, just as conversely the specifically Christian experiences and explanations, as these have come to be expressed in scripture and the long tradition of Christian experience, have their own original power to unlock our common experiences in the world in a critical and productive way.

If tradition, in this case the Jewish-Christian tradition, can be passed on only via renewed experience as living tradition, then this implies *per se* that our present situation forms an intrinsic element of what the Christian message means for us. It is therefore striking that the times in which one appeals to one's own experiences, individual and collective, with new emphasis, are always times of crisis in which one experiences a gap between tradition and experience instead of continuity between (e.g. Christian) experiential tradition and experience which updates it. Of course old experiences also have critical and transformative power; the four structural principles continue to recall precisely this critically. But new experiences too have their own productive and critical power, otherwise the appeal to 'interpretive elements' of old experiences would only have an affirmative and inhibiting influence on our continuing history.

What is presently our modern world of experience? It was precisely the modern feeling for life, especially that which makes it worthwhile for people today, that I wanted to analyze, especially in Part Four of my second Jesus book. Moreover I concentrated my attention on two key points: on the one hand, our ineradicable expectation of a humanly viable future; and on the other hand, the just as stubborn state of shock we are all in regarding that future, since we are continually being confronted with the searing excess of suffering of so many people and the senseless injustice under which the vast majority of humanity groans. – Why, precisely in our time, did this renewed experience become intensified lived experience everywhere? [056]

Modern analyses have made it clear that our Western society, in fact, stood and stands under the banner of 'utilitarian individualism'. This view was first rather crudely formulated in the Enlightenment by Thomas Hobbes, subsequently liberalized by John Locke (whereby the contradiction with the Christian gospel was camouflaged) and translated into economic terms by Adam Smith. This version by Locke is the soul of the entire modern Western society: a neutral state in which the individual may and can strive to maximize his own interests; the end-product of this would then be prosperity, private and public, for each and everyone. This striving does demand a certain self-control and a certain morality, but these then were means. Within this self-control religion as well was highly rated, but in fact that was as a means to maximize this self-interest which, by dint of indefatigable work, diligent industriousness and civic virtues, would lead to success (the Nixon myth). So science and technology also became means of maximizing self-interest. The central value of this utilitarian individualism is freedom, but the fundamental difference between this freedom and the biblical notion of freedom – freedom from sin, from self-interest and stinginess; freedom to do good; freedom in solidarity – was in this way carefully eliminated to the advantage of a 'liberal freedom'; i.e. a freedom to pursue unimpeded one's own aims and interests. In this, the law of the survival of the fittest was actually in effect. Everything was subjected to this, also nature which was polluted beyond measure, also social and interpersonal relationships, even personal feelings, which had to be kept under control because they could only hinder the advancement of one's own prosperity and importance. But the ultimate objective, the meaning of human freedom, was emptied of content, and the rationalization of means became a treadmill, in fact the opposite of what freedom means.

The official churches have affiliated themselves, often unconsciously, with this utilitarian-individualistic society and extolled its civic virtues. But it is this society which, in the 1960s, suddenly and en masse, came under criticism, both from socially critical revolutionary movements as well as from neo-religious
[057] movements which were fleeing society and in this way critical of society. All institutions which were in fact intimately bound up with this society had to suffer for it.

Ethical protests disclose an implicit anthropology. The on-going development of prosperity and power proved no longer to be a self-evident good in itself. The question had arisen as to whether that endless accumulation of power and prosperity does not shatter the quality and the meaning of human life – ecologically, sociologically and personally. In this way, the things and relationships which had been subordinated to instrumental rationalization suddenly received a new significance. Sojourning in an unpolluted nature, social relationships and personal feelings were revalued as an end in itself.

One wants to free them from the repressive control of the technological logic dominating everything at the service of utilitarian individualism. It cannot be denied that this reaction could also be associated with excesses. But before pointing a finger at these excesses, one should have an eye for the ethical character of this protest against utilitarianism and individualism, which is to be found in all these movements. Fundamentally it has to do with a new feeling for ethical values which, moreover, is biblical in its core, whereas the 'ethics' of the dominant society are essentially unbiblical, stingy, the opposite of solidarity.

What formerly had seemed to be of interest almost exclusively to religious people has now become a concern of all sorts of human sciences, techniques and campaigns: they all strive for healing, making whole or salvation of man and his society. It is difficult for one to deny that the demand for pure and viable humaneness, as a demand, is more than ever alive in all of mankind; and that in our time, the response to this becomes all the more urgent to the extent that we, on the one hand, ascertain that people fall short, are deprived, and above all are wronged; and that we, on the other hand, may already experience fragments of human healing and self-liberation. The demand for wholeness and for a viable humaneness, which is operative in both socially critical and 'neo-religious' movements, is posed after all within actual conditions of uprooting and disintegration, of alienation and many types of human oppression. The demand for salvation, formerly only the theme of all religions, has more than ever become the great stimulus or ferment within the entirety of contemporary human existence, quite apart from all religiousness. So the question of salvation is not just religious or theological but, in our time, [058] generally and also consciously the great driving force of all human history.

It is within this new world in which we live and the horizons within which questions are posed that I pose the question of Christianity's own contribution. For new experiences make us see Christianity differently, as we must, if this does not want to become a relic from a bygone time. Religions which are not open to new experiences and cannot integrate them critically grow old and can eventually die out. My purpose is to show that Christianity only becomes fully credible and comprehensible when and in so far as it is able to absorb the impulses from living, struggling and praying humanity; to recognize in them echoes of its own Christian impulses, in order to be in critical solidarity with them, from the perspective of the Christian belief that God does not want mankind to suffer; on the contrary, what we today experience as salvation from God in Jesus is that God posits his honour in the salvation of mankind. . What is salvation by and for men within the context of our contemporary human life?

If Christian salvation is salvation by and for human beings – people, with

mind, heart, soul, corporality, people for whom it is appropriate to turn to nature in order to build up their own world in which to live, and for whom it is appropriate to turn to each other in order to support one another in justice and love and to build up a society in which they can live humanely (see II, 731-43) – then this means that Christian salvation cannot just be the 'salvation of the soul', but rather healing, making the entire human person whole, the person in all his facets and the society in which we live. Therefore Christian salvation also includes ecological, social and political aspects, though it is not exhausted by them. Even though Christian salvation is also more, it is also that! In the course of time, Christians have all too often covered up suppression with an appeal to 'the general good', to love and to mystical and contemplative attitudes in which suffering fades away through God's mystical presence. This latter may be true, it becomes un-Christian if another person's injustice is perpetuated by means of this, sometimes even with theological legitimation. Even now we still hear some Christians proclaim that Christian faith is purely a matter of the heart, a personal conversion, and that Jesus did call to conversion of the heart, to interiority, however not to reforming structures which enslave human persons. A closer analysis of the historical interventions
[059] in Scripture lets us see that this one-sidedness is unchristian; it is only half of the scriptural truth. A pregnant witness to this is Luke 22.25: 'Jesus said, "The kings of the gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you"', and even more sharply Mt. 20.25-26: 'Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you"' (see also Mark 10.42-43). Torturous master-servant relationships should not exist in Christian communities. In this the New Testament clearly acknowledges that the praxis of the kingdom of God includes, in addition to interior renewal of life, a renewal and improvement of the structures of the society. Therefore the New Testamental Christians put this in practice in areas where they could in fact do so, namely in the structuring of their own community, which because of this was experienced as a first realization of the kingdom of God on earth, a space of freedom and peace, of righteousness and love, in which to live. In view of the social-political circumstances, they, as a minority group, could begin little or nothing outside their own community at that time; distancing themselves from social politics was not a decision they made for themselves, but rather happened under pressure from outside. Where this pressure is withdrawn, or, more accurately, where Christians along with others are able to change society, this too becomes an urgent Christian obligation, flowing forth from the gospel of Christ.

The social-political relevance of the gospel follows from this insight. Through this, politics are subjected to criticism, in this sense that the

identification of the Christian with politics as a total system of salvation is unchristian. Christianity rejects everything that absolutizes politics or makes it an ideology; but on the other hand, it radicalizes political efforts as well for the wholeness of the individual and society. A special presence of God is promised precisely to this radical effort for the sake of man and society. Surely, if living man is the fundamental symbol of God, namely 'the image of God', then the place where people are dishonoured, oppressed and enslaved, in their own heart as well as in society, is at the same time the privileged place where religious experience becomes possible in and through a life-style which seeks to give form to that symbol, to make it whole and, liberating it, to bring it to [060] itself. Therefore real liberation, redemption and salvation always slide into mysticism, because for religious people, the ultimate foundation and source for the healing and salvation for mankind, living and dead, is found only in God. His honour is man's salvation. Apart from him, we can sustain no 'reasonable' expectation, for history can offer us no credentials other than in the history of Jesus the Christ.

Only when someone in opposition to injustice in all its forms has to suffer at the hands of others precisely for that reason, can he do this for others: to suffer for a good cause. Then the commitment to the good cause is so radical that the consequences for one's own life are no longer important. It is precisely here too that the saving merit of Jesus' death is located; for it points to the unconditional nature of his message and his life-style in conformity with it, to the unconditional nature of his gift and commitment, to the authenticity of his entire person, message and acting.

(b) Putting the critical correlation into practice

Now when we critically look at both of the poles of the correlation, we can say the following.

In the New Testament, the story of Jesus is experienced as the luminous and transforming symbol which discloses the depth-dimension of our finite existence to our understanding. What surfaced in Jesus' words and deeds, in his life and death, is evocative for our own human experiences: it discloses our own existence, it illuminates what authentic human life can be when it knows itself to be safe and secure in the hand of the living God and is challenged by this. Moreover, based on this 'clicking' between what has come to light in Jesus and what people experience in the depths of their everyday existence, the Christian language will disclose precisely the human world of the senses in a decisive and definitive way for believers. They recognize themselves in Jesus the Lord. At the same time, the transforming power of this representative symbol calls us to a conversion in faith; in other words, the 'clicking' is only

accomplished in a *metanoia* or conversion, and not in a simple correlation.

So if people are looking for the best symbols which verbalize the depth
[061] dimension of their existence in the most adequate way – what indeed can only happen in symbols, parables and metaphors; in a story, – then as Christians they find no symbol more apt and adapted, no word more expressive, than the Word of God: Jesus as the representative and productive symbol of the most authentic way of being a human person in a world which is God's. Christians find the most adequate expression of the depth dimension harboured in all our everyday experiences – what can rightly be called a primal trust or a fundamental belief – in Jesus Christ. For precisely that reason, individual, historically unique originality and human universality go hand in hand in Jesus. Just as a unique, utterly original love relationship of two people is a matter of universal experience, so too does the original, specific and historical life journey of Jesus reveal something generally human. The historical particularity does not do away with the universality, but manifests it. That is why the Christian encounter of a few people with Jesus could become a world religion with a message that can speak to all people.

Accordingly the structure of the Christian faith explains that the truth of Jesus Christ, that which discloses the deepest dimensions of our existence – both our practical basic trust as well as God as its source – can be listened to by all, lettered and unlettered, who are wrestling with the same life's problems. One does not have to be an exegete in order to be able to be a good Christian, however necessary this specialized function is for the benefit of the faith community. The idea that the human sense of depth, which is interpreted through the life and death of Jesus, is only to be experienced in a context of critical thought, rests on an intellectual misunderstanding of the reality of faith. The only thing asked is an open eye and an open ear for the kinship between Jesus' words and deeds, his life and death, and our own experience of existence. The same life's problems are at stake on both sides. Jesus' life and death can unlock our own experience of existence and critically bring it up for discussion in such a way that we are able to acknowledge the authentic possibilities for human life in it. To live like this is to live well. Then it clicks between Jesus' life and ours. Then there is disclosure of a new, self-giving 'righteousness', which dares to risk living on the frontier where one stands in
[062] the presence of the God of grace and judgment, as this God appeared in Jesus Christ. Then, as Christians, we become not only confronted with God in the human person Jesus, as source of our existence and salvation, but we know ourselves as also addressed by God in him. Finally, choosing for Jesus on the basis of our human experiences comes to be experienced as being chosen by God in Jesus, who does indeed reveal me to myself by revealing my Foundation and Salvation to me. That is why Christians also call Jesus the

decisive and definitive exegete of God, the Word of God, and not just the exegete of our human existence: God as salvation by and for men. Thus Christianity has to do with the integration of the human in and through a fundamental experience in which one, confronted with the man Jesus, links the world, the we and the I in it, with the absolute foundation, the living God, our salvation.

For the Christian who has undergone this Christian experience of life, in the light of the tradition of Christian experience, with his humanly ambivalent experiences, the Christian profession of faith is no longer a hypothesis but a firm conviction which will develop into mysticism and a corresponding praxis. But then too, he will have to be prepared 'to make a defense of the hope that is in him' (I Peter 3.15b), and furthermore he will have to take into consideration that, as long as history lasts, his experiences will still prove to be limited and challenged by new experiences. For all his conviction, he remains an open person. In other words, time and time again with respect to new experiences, the firm conviction again becomes a 'hypothesis' which will be tested in and on the new experiences.

Soteriology, christology and anthropology cannot be separated; they mutually clarify each other. The demand for Christian identity essentially has to do with the demand for human integrity, and in such a way that this demand for identity cannot be solved purely theoretically, but essentially includes the demand for a specific – contemplative and political – way of life. For God always has to be considered in such a way that he is never just considered: talking about God stands under the primacy of our way of life; it is subject to the question of our real concerns in life. Irenaeus has clearly formulated all this: *Gloria Dei, vivens homo. Vita autem hominis, visio Dei,* the glory of God is man alive; and the life of man is the vision of God (*Adversus Haereses* IV, 20,7). This patristic quotation precisely summarizes the tone of what a critical correlation between experiences-then and experiences-now can [063] accomplish. God's honour is in man's happiness and the raising up of the lowly and the oppressed; but man's honour and man's happiness are ultimately in God. In Irenaeus, this Christian conviction about life does sound Hellenistic, expressed late antiquity's sentiments towards life, too formal and abstract for our sentiments. In Irenaeus' formulation, the specific mediation of Jesus of Nazareth – in a historical situation which ends up in a human fiasco – holds a central place more formally than historically. In my two Jesus books I have tried to fill this out more concretely: from a more historically oriented study of Jesus as well as, and in correlation with this, from the perspective of our contemporary problems of life: our life and endeavours, our suffering, struggling and utopian dreams within a history of meaning and meaninglessness which is felt to be very real. From this then it may have

become clear that the Christian belief in Jesus, as the 'eschatological prophet' of the approaching kingdom of God, who was executed by men but raised from the dead to life by God, – 1. is primarily a faith-inspired confession of God's own specific way of acting with respect to this Jesus: God shows himself to be in solidarity with Jesus, the prophet of salvation-from-God, by and for men, who was rejected and cast out by men: God confirmed his way of life, definitively; – 2. and that the resulting belief in Jesus as the risen Christ also demands of us a way of life in conformity with the kingdom of God, especially (a) with the realization that whoever confesses this resurrection faith must dare – following Jesus – to become the disinterested partisan of the the oppressed and humiliated, (b) knowing on the one hand that in that case he too, like Jesus, takes the chance of being oppressed and done away with himself by 'this world', (*c*) on the other hand, in this belief, being convinced that he too – likewise following Jesus in this – is irrevocably accepted by God: 'if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him' (Rom. 8.17b). This is the New Testament belief in God which, despite all appearances in the world and in the church, 'overcomes the world' (I John 5.4).

Chapter 5

FUNDAMENTAL POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

(*a) Jesus, the Mosaic-messianic 'eschatological prophet'*

One of the fundamental theses in *Jesus, an Experiment in Christology* is that the eschatological prophet-like-Moses was more than likely the first interpretation of Jesus by pre-New Testamental Christianity, and that this tendency can still be recognized in diverse early Christian strata from the New Testament (I, 475-99; II, 309-21).

This early-Jewish, intertestamental religious concept goes back to a 'Deuteronomic' view (Deut. 18.15-19; 30.15-20; 30.2). 'I am going to send an angel (aggelos) in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Be attentive to him and listen to his voice;... for my name is in him. But if you listen attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.' When my angel goes in front of you (Ex. 23.20-23; see 33.2): 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me (= Moses) from among your own people, you shall heed such a prophet' (Deut. 18.15).

Originally the tradition of the eschatological prophet was not connected with an expectation of Elijah (Mal. 4.5; see also Sir. 48.10-11); it belonged to the Moses tradition, for it is indeed clear that in Mal. 4.5 the forerunner, Elijah, is a secondary insertion (see Mal. 3.1, which is tied to the original prophet-like-Moses). In early Judaism the figure of Elijah received the function of forerunner of the Anointed. However, this secondary tradition is supported by an older, Deuteronomic tradition where Moses is a prophet, a proclaimer of the word. Deuteronomy is essentially composed as a discourse by Moses (Deut. 5.1,5,14; 6.1). Moses is a mediator between God and the people (Deut. 5.5); at the same time he is a suffering mediator, because in addition to being a [065] spokesman for his people (Deut. 9.15-19; 9.25-29), Moses suffers for his people Israel (see Deut. 1.37; 4.21f.). For Deuteronomy, Moses is the suffering prophet. Later prophets are therefore fond of presenting themselves with the prophetic aspects of Moses (see Jer. 1.7 in comparison with Ex. 4.10; Jer. 1.9 in

comparison with Ex. 18.18; Jer. 15.1 in which Moses is explicitly named; see also Elijah and Elisha, I Kings 19.19-21; II Kings 2.1-15 in comparison with Deut. 34.9 and Num. 27.15-23: the Moses-Joshua duo). In this tradition it is also said: 'When there are prophets among you, I the Lord make myself known to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face' (Num. 12.6-8) 'as one speaks to a friend' (Ex. 33.11), 'from face to face' (Ex. 33.10-11). This tradition also says of the prophetic Moses that he is 'Ebed Yahweh,' servant of God (Ex. 14.31; Num. 12.7-8; Deut. 34.5; Josh. 1.2,7; Wisdom 10.16; Isa. 63.11). Moreover, Moses is a suffering Ebed Yahweh, 'who bears the burden of the people' (Num. 17.14; see Isa. 53.4).

Moses, the suffering servant of God and prophet! Perhaps we can say even more. It seems probable that even the motif of the 'suffering righteous one', which forms a separate motif in itself, is fused in Deutero-Isaiah with the theme of 'Moses as the suffering, prophetic servant of God': the Deutero-Isaian suffering servant of God (especially Isa. 42.1-4; 49.1-6; 50.4-11a; 52.13-53.12). In the final redaction of Isaiah, one may not place Proto-, Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah next to each other as three disparate blocks; rather, an overall look at the final redaction is needed. The prophetically royal Moses who bears the burdens of his people is, then, the Deutero-Isaian suffering servant of God. So Deutero-Isaiah would have spoken about the suffering servant of God in terminology which at least is strongly reminiscent of the developing image of the 'eschatological prophet' like Moses and greater than Moses (II, 312-21). Like Moses, he mediates the law and justice (Isa. 42.1-2), but now worldwide: the suffering Ebed-like-Moses, is 'the Light of the world' (Isa. 49.5-9; 42.1-6); and like Moses he is a mediator of the covenant (Isa. 42.6; 49.8), leader of the new exodus, this time from the Babylonian captivity. As a result of this exodus, the twelve tribes are again gathered together (Isa. 49.5-6; 43.5-6). In this exodus the eschatological prophet-greater-than-Moses will once again make water flow from the rock and offer his people 'water of life' (Isa. 41.18; 43.20; 48.21;
[066] 49.10; see the Gospel of John!). The suffering servant of God is the Moses of the new exodus (Isa. 43.16-21): the Mosaic servant of God who is atoning sins and suffering for his people does indeed bear all the characteristic features of the figure who, as far as content goes, is called the Messianic eschatological prophet-like-Moses in early Judaism. Moreover, right before Jesus' time, this motif ultimately developed into a Moses-mysticism which was also called 'Sinaitism' (see as early as Sir. 45.1-5): the royal messianic prophet Moses, the *divus.*

Now it is striking that, in the most diverse early Christian traditions, the concept of the Mosaic eschatological prophet is clearly and demonstrably present: in the oldest (Mark) and the latest (John) gospel, as well as in the

Lucan account of Stephen's address and in the Q tradition (etc., etc.).

Mark 1.2 begins his gospel with an implicit reference to the classical texts of the tradition of the eschatological prophet (Ex. 23.20; Mal. 3.1 and Isa. 40.3): 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face' (Mark 1.2): 'before you', i.e. before Jesus, John the Baptist is sent out, who will herald 'the prophet after and greater than Moses': 'a prophet from your midst and from your brothers' (cf. Deut. 18.15-18 with Mark 6.4). Moreover, in Mark 6.14-16 three erroneous prophetic identifications related to Jesus are rejected: (a) Jesus is not John the Baptist risen from the dead (Mark 6.14; whose body after all was laid in the grave, Mark 6.29); (b) neither is he Elijah, who was already identified with the Baptist (Mark 1.2 and 9.11-13); (c) finally Jesus is also not 'a prophet like the others' (Mark 6.15). Elijah, then Moses, then Jesus (Mark 9.2-9), after which, as if it were self-evident, follows: 'Listen to him' (Mark 9.7; see Deut. 18.15 and Ex. 23.20-23). In all the gospels we find the motif: Jesus is a prophet, but 'not like the others'. Nowhere do they polemicize against the conception of Jesus as the prophet: but they do polemicize against the perspective of a prophet like the others. In our Christian preaching, precisely this original way of viewing Christ as prophet, a concept which does not make other honorific titles superfluous, has almost disappeared. One can make Christ into such a heavenly icon, which one has pushed so far to the side of God, who himself has already disappeared from the world of human persons, that he loses all critical power as prophet in our world.

Some critics are of the opinion that the 'eschatological prophet' (which in no sense only means the 'last prophet') is an honorific title that is christologically too low and in any case inadequate to support the other, perhaps heavier, [067] New Testamental honorific titles. Then one is thinking quite minimally about the significance of 'eschatological'! The concept of eschatological prophet includes, and certainly in the New Testament, that this prophet has world historical significance, a significance for the whole of subsequent history, however Jesus and his followers may have conceived of this subsequent history. So eschatological prophet implies: a prophet who claims to bring a definitive message which applies to the whole of history. The fact that Jesus himself was convinced of this, and even more: that he attributed world-historical significance to his person, is apparent from the texts in the Q tradition which provide all the guarantees that we are hearing a historical echo of Jesus' own understanding of himself in them: 'Blessed is he who takes no offence in me' (Luke 7.23 = Matt. 11.6); developed in another Q text: 'And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before people, the Son of Man will acknowledge as his own before God's angels. But whoever denies me before people will be denied before God's angels' (Luke 12.8-9 = Matt. 10.32-33; cf. Luke 7.18-22 = Matt. 11.2-6; and Luke 11.20 = Matt. 12.28), which then receives

further development in the synoptics (Matt. 12.32; Luke 12.10; Mark 3.28-29). The affirmation of a real relationship between the decision which people make about Jesus and their ultimate destiny (stressed even more strongly by the Gospel of John) in essence undoubtedly goes back historically to Jesus' own understanding of himself. The first Christians expressed this understanding which Jesus had of himself, expressed in the whole of Jesus' life, with the concept 'eschatological prophet': the mediator in the coming of the kingdom of God. The fact that, with the coming of Jesus, God himself almost touches us, is a Christian conviction which ultimately therefore goes back to Jesus' understanding of himself.

If the future or historical effect of a person belongs to the identity of that person (I, 44f.), then this applies in a unique way to Jesus, for today's living Christian communities do not simply belong to the complete personal identity of Jesus as a matter of chance. In such a case, the historical effect of a person begins to belong to his identity in a very special way. This is precisely what the first Christians expressed with the concept 'eschatological prophet'. In and
[068] through what he is, says and does, Jesus points beyond himself to the entire and the subsequent history of humanity as the coming of God's kingdom.

Whenever one does not have confidence in Jesus, one can naturally always claim that Jesus was mistaken in this understanding of himself, or that he overestimated himself. Historically, it can be established that Jesus thought like this; however, not that Jesus was correct in this. To confess this is precisely the Christian act of faith, which cannot be further mediated by theoretical argument. Only by the living witness of Christians over the course of time can it be 'shown' to some degree that the liberating and reconciling action of the churches, as 'service of reconciliation' (II Cor. 5.19), is not a chance event, but the realization in history of Jesus' message which in this way reveals something of its truth in history. An upright Jew, Gamaliel, formulated it quite clearly later in connection with the persecutions of Christians: 'Keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God' (Acts 5.38-39). This wise advice, too, is connected with the idea of the prophet-greater-than-Moses: 'I send my messenger before you […] do not rebel against him […] for my name is in him' (Ex. 23.20-23; see 33.2).

Now what do my critics say about this way of presenting things? It is striking that A. Descamps, who precisely addresses the entire exegetical section of my book at length, does not express a single criticism about the significance of the eschatological prophet in my first Jesus book. Apart from a couple of theologians, exegetes seem rather to acknowledge its correct intuition. Furthermore, the increasing literature (see II, 312 n.3; II, 247 n.117

[Collected Works n. 10]) regarding the eschatological prophet as pre-New-Testamental Christian background of the New Testament is beginning to move in the direction of a consensus. The discussions about this are not concerned with the idea of the eschatological prophet, but rather with the question of to what extent this idea was generally known in pre-Christian times and in the time of Jesus, or more precisely, what its specific content was. In this instance, J. Nützel, who is rather critical of pronounced views like those of R. Pesch and K. Berger, has to admit that the expectation, not just of eschatological prophets but even of killed and 'risen' prophets who come back to earth, undoubtedly existed in Jesus' time; and although this idea is not so generally widespread, it [069]
was known in Egypt and Asia Minor, but not without Palestinian sources.[30] Nonetheless, that discussion seems to me to have been too much inspired, either on the one hand by a search for perfect pre-Christian parallels, or on the other by an unexpressed apologetic fear that the model of the killed but raised from the dead eschatological prophet might compromise the uniqueness of Jesus' resurrection and ascension. I do neither the one nor the other in my Jesus books, but only look *in* the New Testament for the pre-New Testamental Christian titles given to Jesus, and from that it appears that the idea of '*the* prophet' and 'the coming one' certainly had a central place.[31] In other words: from the exegetical literature there appears to be a growing consensus with respect to an original Palestinian Prophet christology. The real criticism is concerned, therefore, not so much with the foregoing as with what now follows.

I see the concept of Mosaic-messianic 'eschatological prophet' as a matrix from which four pre-New Testamental credal models have arisen which afterwards coalesced in the New Testament under the overarching theme of Easter christology. These are:

1. Maranatha christologies, which confess Jesus as the Lord of the future, the Coming One;

2. A christology which sees Jesus as the 'wonder-worker', not so much in the line of the then sporadic '*theios anèr*' theories but rather in the line of the Solomonic good and wise wonder-worker, who works wonders not for his own profit but for the sake of the salvation of others, and precisely for that

[30] J. Nützel, 'Zum Schicksal der eschatologischen Profeten', *Biblische Zeitschrift* 20, 1976, 59-94, in connection with R. Pesch, 'Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu', (Tübinger) *Theologische Quartalschrift* 153, 1973, 201-228, which could have made use of the book by K. Berger which appeared later as *Die Auferstehung des Propheten und die Erhöhung des Menschensohnes,* Göttingen 1976.

[31] Besides the literature cited in II, 870 n. 8, and II, 865 n. 117, the following works have been published since my first Jesus book: F. Schnider, *Jesus der Prophet,* Freiburg-Göttingen 1973; F. Mussner, 'Ursprünge und Entfaltung der neutestamentliche Sohneschristologie', in L. Scheffczyk, ed., *Grundfragen der Christologie heute,* Quaestiones Disputatae 72, Freiburg 1975, 77-113.

reason is reviled, but whose honour is restored by God;

3. Wisdom christologies, which see Jesus as sent from God by Wisdom (low-sapiential) or as identified with the independent Wisdom which proclaims the mysteries of God's salvation (high- sapiential);

4. Finally, all of the various forms of Easter christologies in which Jesus' death and resurrection in particular occupy a central place (I, 403-39).

Each of these four credal trends shows a special interest in specific historical facets of Jesus' life: the proclaimer of the coming kingdom of God, with the
[070] final judgment as its counterpart; Jesus, who went about doing good in the land of Palestine; Jesus, who reveals God to man and man to himself; Jesus as the one condemned to death. From this it appears that all the early Christian creeds or visions of Jesus are, in any case at the deepest level, guided and regulated by real, historically demonstrable aspects of Jesus' life. Precisely this aspect was especially applauded by many exegetes who reviewed my book.

The fact that these four attempts at a christological interpretation of the historical 'phenomenon of Jesus', subject to mutual correction and completion, could merge into the one canonical scripture with the one fundamental vision of the crucified and risen Jesus as seen in the gospels and the New Testament, is an indication that in all these interpretations of Jesus there must have been a common identification of his person which can be approached from many different directions. For me this is: Jesus, the eschatological prophet, who was interpreted in the prophetic 'Christ' tradition as 'the one inspired by God', the 'one filled with God's Spirit', who 'brings the good news that God is going to reign' (a fusion of Deut. 18.15 with texts from Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah in Judaism), the eschatological prophet-greater-than-Moses who speaks with God 'face to face', 'mouth to mouth' (Num. 12.6-8; Ex. 33.10-11). The final one whom God sends is his beloved Son (Mark 12.6): this is the eschatological prophet, greater than Moses. This key concept, when filled in by Jesus' own life and death, is indeed able to support all other honorific titles and to expose their deepest significance for salvation. One can say that the continuity between Jesus before and after his death is established by the acknowledgment that Jesus is the eschatological prophet, an early Christian interpretation of Jesus' own understanding of himself.

There has been some criticism of the hypothesis that the eschatological prophet is the foundation on which the other honorific titles have been further developed. Before I go into this, I must clear up a more fundamental misunderstanding. For reactions of others often best reveal what you yourself intended and nonetheless have not expressed precisely. Here this is clearly the case. Although I call Jesus, as eschatological prophet, the bond which holds together the four credal directions (it has to do with 'tendencies') in the early church, and although I furthermore do indeed call this pre-New Testament

vision 'the basic creed of all Christianity' (I, 440) on one occasion, nonetheless [071]
when cataloging the four pre-New Testamental credal directions, I did not refer to the creed of Jesus, the eschatological prophet! In that omission lay for me precisely the conclusion that the 'eschatological prophet' in itself was not a credal direction. So this, despite my single use of 'basic creed', which was then used in the same sense as that in which E. Käsemann, for example, has called the apocalyptic 'the mother of all Christianity'; that is also why I speak of a 'matrix'. Precisely because the presumption that Jesus, the coming one, was the eschatological prophet, is most probably a pre-Easter given, I do not speak of a separate early Christian creed of the eschatological prophet. This, therefore, means that this concept, or better: this sub-stratum of the four credal directions, is always supplied in the post-Easter period by one of the four creeds which I have signaled. I myself call the maranatha or parousia christology 'apparently the earliest creed' (I, 395, and especially 406). My hypothesis, therefore, even though I have indeed made this insufficiently clear,[32] is that after the death of Jesus, his identification with the eschatological prophet must have immediately taken the form of the parousia kerygma, i.e. that despite the death and apparent failure of Jesus, the great herald of the coming kingdom of God, this kingdom of God will come. Moreover, I myself repeatedly say that the Q tradition does not honour a resurrection christology, but rather unmistakably a maranatha christology (I, 410). The exegete A. Descamps even calls this opinion, namely that of the parousia christology of the eschatological prophet, the 'christology of him who will come' as chronologically preceding the resurrection kerygma, 'l'acquisition la plus nouvelle' of my first Jesus book, a gain which he applauds.[33]

If one in this way explicitly fills out my intention, which in my first Jesus book was to some extent left unclear, this also means that the eschatological prophet Jesus within the parousia kerygma is called the matrix of all christological honorific titles by me. On closer examination, this is indeed not clearly enough expressed in my book, but it was the intention. Therefore I would now like to say precisely: *the parousia christology is the mother of all Christianity:* Jesus is 'the Coming One'. In other words, the mother of all Christianity is not the apocalyptic as such, but the faith-inspired conviction [072]
that, despite all appearances to the contrary, the kingdom of God is nonetheless coming. Hence the fundamental prayer of Christianity: 'Your kingdom come!' With this clarification, what I was saying also becomes clearer

[32] Cf. P. Schoonenberg, 'Schillebeeckx en de exegese', in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 15, 1975, 278; drawing on this also L. Bakker, 'Het oudtestamentisch tegoed van de christelijke theologie', in *Proef en Toets. Theologie als experiment,* Amersfoort 1977, (86-102) 90.

[33] 'Nous croyons cette thèse défendable, et ce sera peut-être là – du moins pour un grand nombre, — l'acquisition la plus nouvelle de leur lecture de ce "Jezus"', A. L. Descamps, 'Compte Rendu', in *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 6, 1975, 220.

(I, 396), that the proclaimers of this parousia christology, as it were, spontaneously could and were allowed to experience a resurrection kerygma, coming from elsewhere and also early Christian, based on 'appearances' (which I historically connect with the second credal direction of the one who does good deeds, I, 426-8), as explicitation of their own parousia kerygma: 'the Coming One' already lives with God, ready to act for our salvation. The parousia christology of the eschatological prophet is wholly characterized by the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus and by Jesus' mediating role in this coming. Therefore this christology is 'less' concentrated on the person of Jesus than the explicit resurrection christology with Jesus' current dominion.

This clarification is already an initial response to other objections, in which it is said that I would attribute to the 'eschatological prophet' the potentiality from which all further christological honorific titles become clear, so that these honorific titles are only variants of what would already be implicitly contained in the concept of 'eschatological prophet' (I, 487-99). Then one does have to consider also that not so little was thought about eschatological prophetic figures as we now might suspect, namely only in the sense of a 'very great' prophet. Apart from this, it is substantially a hypothesis that this concept 'in itself' could call up all other honorific titles, a hypothesis which nonetheless is based on several solid indications. A unilinear development is, however, difficult to maintain, and that is why my assertion that the eschatological prophet is the 'main source' (I, 480) of all honorific titles is premature, at least outside the context of its insertion into a parousia christology.[34] The critical question is, after all, whether Mark has joined two independent traditions whenever he connects Jesus as the prophet-greater-than-all-others with Jesus as the Son of God. It is certain that due to qualifying Jesus eschatologically as the prophet who has been sent from God, Mark distinguishes Jesus from other prophets precisely as the Son of God, as Mark 12.1-12 in connection with 11.27-33 clearly suggests: all the messengers are mistreated or killed, and then the
[073] owner of the vineyard sent '*ton eschaton'*, the very last one of all, namely 'his beloved son' (Mark 12.6). In Mark are we originally dealing with two independent traditions, or could Mark, from the perspective of the eschatological character of this prophet Jesus, affirm his Sonship? This deserves to be researched further. However, in view of the fact that the special manner of speaking about God as 'Abba' is a central and indubitable datum in the life of Jesus, the inevitable corollary of it, namely Jesus' consciousness of being son of this Father in a special way, is also difficult to deny. And although we have no *verba ipsissimua Jesu* of this in the New Testament, the way in which Jesus speaks to others about his Father must have at the same time

[34] I was criticized for this by H. Berkhof, 'Over Schillebeeckx' Jezusboek', in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 29, 1975, 322-331.

revealed something of his own understanding of himself! In this sense, the Christian title: Jesus as the Son of God clearly goes back to Jesus' understanding of himself, which does not mean that Jesus *proclaimed* himself as the Son of God. In II, 428-33 in particular I have discussed various traditions on the basis of which Jesus was called the Son. But titles which were already known, such as Messiah, Son of God, Servant of God, etc., also lent themselves easily to being connected with the concept of the Mosaic eschatological prophet at that time. One will have to acknowledge the fact that the Palestinian prophet-christology has become connected with other early Christian traditions and their, at least for us, more weighty honorific titles. So these are, in fact, not purely intrinsically developed from the prophet christology, without being able to deny its 'potentiality'. For along with this, one may not forget that precisely the 'Mosaic prophet' can be intrinsically connected with Jesus' 'Abba' experience. God speaks to his servant Moses 'from mouth to mouth,' 'face to face' (Ex. 33.10-11; Num. 12.8), 'as a person speaks to a friend' (Ex. 33.11), in contrast to his speaking in visions to other prophets. The emerging idea of 'the Coming One' (terminologically identified with the eschatological prophet) was also connected with this tradition. So the special experience of God also holds a central place in the concept Mosaic 'eschatological prophet'. This is also the reason why, in Part Four of *Jesus,* and based on the central idea 'eschatological prophet', I took the Abba experience as the foundation of the provisional 'systematization' given there (see below). Jesus' own understanding of God as Father, together with his entire life's work, seems to me to have been precisely the source on the basis of which his [074] disciples acknowledged in him the appearance of the eschatological prophet who will judge the living and the dead.

(*b*) *Not underestimating Easter christology*

In contrast to the exegete A. L. Descamps who, it is true, makes some pertinent historical observations concerning my interpretation of the empty tomb and the appearances, but who in addition repeatedly says that I have in no sense reduced Easter christology, and thus the Christian faith, with my interpretation,[35] theologians such as W. Löser[36] and to a somewhat lesser degree W. Kasper[37] claim that, to put it mildly, the Easter christology in my first Jesus book, turns out to be too narrow and distorted. However, what does my text itself say?

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[35] A. L. Descamps, in *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 6, 1975, (213-223) 218, 220, 221; see also A. L. Descamps, 'Résurrection de Jésus et "croyable disponible"', in *Savoir, faire, espérer; les limites de la raison,* Brussels 1976, Vol. 2, 713-737.

[36] W. Löser, in *Theologie und Philosophie* 51, 1976, (257-266) esp. 264-266.

[37] W. Kasper, in *Evangelisches Kommentar* H.6, 1976, (357-360) 360A.

First of all I must admit that I myself, at least in my first two Dutch editions, could have given occasion to misunderstanding, contrary to my own intentions. When I noticed this, I immediately removed these misunderstandings in an article which appeared in *Kultuurleven* and after that in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie,*[38] the substance of which was then incorporated into the book itself from the third Dutch edition on (I, 528a-528e; in the translations this was already included in all first editions). I present that insertion as an authentic reflection of what I had intended, in other words, not as a correction of it. However I must admit that, in the first editions, the distinction I made there between 'appearances' (as expression of the Easter experience) and gospel 'stories about' appearances was not consistently maintained throughout all my texts. The consequence of this was that I gave the impression that faith in the resurrection is separate from what is intended in the New Testament by 'appearances'. Therefore I explicitly removed this misunderstanding in I, 528a-528e. It is true that the resurrection kerygma precedes the filled-out stories of 'appearances of Jesus', but in the New Testament there is an undeniable intrinsic connection between Jesus' resurrection and the Christian Easter experience, expressed in the model of 'appearances'. The fact that just a couple of German reviewers, who were only dealing with this (not corrected but) clarifying version nonetheless still wrongly interpret my hypothesis is puzzling to me. A. Descamps rightly says that the hypothesis that the
[075] appearances tradition is of a later date than belief in the resurrection, and that the resurrection faith would thus be independent of the 'appearances' (for me this means: what is intended with them), is historically untenable; in other words, it is a historical fact that the experience of the presence of the Risen One chronologically precedes the further elaboration of the Easter kerygma.[39] But this is precisely my hypothesis, as has begun to appear more clearly from the addition (I, 528a-e), which Descamps, in contrast to the German reviewers, did not know when he wrote down his criticism.

For me, the problem comes down to the question: 'How do you know?', i.e. how did the first Christians arrive at the knowledge that Jesus was risen and not just will rise at the end of time? The resurrection as a non-empirical event of and with Jesus himself after his death is as such transhistorical, but the belief in Jesus' resurrection is a event of and in our history, and as such, in principle, accessible to a historic genetic analysis. The latter is precisely what I wanted to undertake. This is my hypothesis in the first Jesus book: whatever the historical value of the motif of the 'empty tomb' is, and the historical value of the

[38] *Kultuurleven* 42, 1975, 81-93, and *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 15, 1975, (1-24) 19-23.

[39] Descamps, op. cit., 218; apparently Descamps has not the third but the first two Dutch editions in mind; even then, however, Descamps adds 'The author's hypothesis is not incompatible with the faith' (218). His 'non liquet' (223) is only understandable from the perspective of the misunderstanding caused by the first two Dutch editions.

psychological occurring of visions (I shall return to this later), the belief in the Jesus who is risen and lives with God and among us cannot be founded on an empty tomb as such, nor as such on the visual elements which could have been in 'appearances' of Jesus, which does not per se have to include the negation that the tomb as well as the appearance visions were a historical reality. Then what are the reconstructable factors, as historical mediation of the grace of the risen Jesus, which brought the disciples to that belief? I see these in a process of conversion in which the cognitive element is fundamental; and after study of the reviews, I see no reason to modify my opinion in this respect. The New Testament indicates an intrinsic connection between the Christian confession of Jesus' real resurrection and what is actually mentioned in the stories of the appearances. In other words, there is a connection, not with the stories as such, but with what is intended by them. For it is notable that the verbal content of the same 'appearances', narrated by diverse New Testament authors, is filled out with the evangelists' own christology and ecclesiology; and that Paul, moreover, who uses the same classical terminology (*ōphthē,* he showed himself), does not see *Jesus* at all: he simply saw light and heard a voice (moreover, in the three stories about this which the Acts of the Apostles provides, that voice says very different things each time, Acts 9; 22; and 26). All [076] this already indicates that we must not let the scriptures say things which they in fact do not intend to say. That is why one must first properly establish what the New Testament positively intends to say in each case. And undoubtedly that is: (a) the belief in the resurrection is not something thought up by human persons, but a revelatory grace from God in and through Jesus himself (Gal. 1.1,16; Matt. 16.16-18); (b) this grace is no sudden 'invasion from above', in other words, no hocus pocus, but is effective in and through psychic realities and human experiences. Whatever may be intended by appearance, the experience of an appearance is at any rate also such a psychic reality. That is precisely the reason why I say that what is intended with appearances is not purely fruit of the disciples' reflections on the pre-Easter Jesus and nothing more, even though this reflection inevitably plays an important role in the origin of the belief in Jesus' resurrection. In the stories of the appearances, the grace character of the belief in the resurrection is presented, as it were, in vertical form: Jesus himself makes his disciples understand that he is the Living One. How? A believer's research may place no limits on God's possibilities here but, on the other hand, even less may it blame naive representations on the biblical authors. The fact that there were certain Jews and Christians who equated the resurrection of the body with the resuscitation of a corpse is not to be denied. And the origin of the motif of the empty tomb, or the theological significance which the evangelists attach to the historical finding of the empty tomb, undoubtedly has something to do with this

(Compare Mark 6.16 with 6.29!). But one cannot base any responsible faith in the resurrection on a tomb which was found empty, however great a symbol this may be of Jesus' non-presence among the dead: of his resurrection (I, 334-7).[40] One does not look for the Living One in a cemetery.

Death ended the disciples' communion in life with the Jesus of history, which was even more intensified due to the fact that they, in whatever way, had deserted their master, i.e. they 'had not followed' him, while after all that is the task of each disciple of Jesus. Nonetheless, some time after this, these
[077] disheartened disciples proclaim that their dead master had risen from the dead. Then the obvious question is: what happened in the time between Jesus' death and this proclamation? The resurrection itself is a real event, accomplished by God in Jesus, but is as such an event beyond the boundaries of death, and of course the disciples could not 'participate' in this meta-historical event. In contrast to some apocryphal writings, the New Testament refrains from attempting any account of the resurrection itself.

Whoever initially has taken offence at Jesus' arrest and death, and after that proclaims him as the sole and universal bearer of salvation, has undeniably experienced a turnabout: he has undergone a conversion, and this really is a historically determinable fact. So a conversion – from disillusionment with Jesus to *metanoia* and acknowledgement that he indeed was and is the eschatological prophet, the coming one, the redeemer of the world, the Christ, the Son of Man and Son of God – must be historically accepted if the disciples' turnabout is to be to some extent intelligible as historical fact. The Gospel of Mark already sees a connection between 'denial' and 'appearances of Jesus' (Mark 14.28 → 14.29-31→ 16.7). This does not have to do only with the regret that they have abandoned Jesus, not by a long shot, for Mark says of Peter that already before Jesus' death he wept bitterly over this. What is at stake is the conversion process of becoming *Christian* in the full sense of the word: and this makes up the grace of Easter. Moreover, in the entire New Testament this is strongly linked with the conversion which finds its illuminating consummation in Christian baptism – *phōtismos,* baptism as illumination. Many factors play a part in this process: the productive remembrance of Jesus' fundamental message of a merciful God, concerned for humanity, who puts no conditions on his love; the presumption from of old that he must be the eschatological prophet; reflection on the fate of the innocent sufferers in the Bible and the suffering prophet, etc. Would God identify himself with those rejected by men? This certainly had been the core of Jesus' message and way of life. The Jewish spirituality as well, which is confirmed by Jesus and intensified

[40] I wonder which theory of symbols W. Kasper is honouring if he, on his part, may call the tomb a 'real sign' of the resurrection faith, while I say the same thing using the word 'symbol', and Kasper then neutralizes 'symbol' in advance as '*just a* symbol' (op. cit., 359A).

by his intimate converse with the Father, says that communion of life with God is stronger than death. All of this is at the same time a process of grace: they [078]
recornize the Christ in Jesus and experience his living presence among them.

In addition, there were models of conversion stories in Jesus' time: the conversion of a gentile to Judaism was not infrequently presented through the model of 'appearances', especially light phenomena. Conversion takes place as an illumination from above. Finally Jesus' disciples, among whom Peter seems to have been the first historically, also experience within themselves a complete renewal of life. In and through this renewal of life and the experience of Jesus' spiritual presence, the disciples receive insight into what has been accomplished in Jesus himself through God: God has justified him through his resurrection from the dead, he is truly risen. That is why it is not meaningful to explain the resurrection only as confirmation of Jesus' message. Semitically, prophetic messages are confirmed by their fulfillment. Resurrection faith, as recounted in the New Testament, is only meaningful on the assumption that one gives Jesus, in his teaching and ministry, a fundamental place in the coming of the kingdom of God; a place which he will continue to occupy despite the rejection by fellow-believers. That is why resurrection faith is essentially connected with faith in the abiding constitutive significance of Jesus for the nonetheless coming of the kingdom of God; there it finds its unique sufficient foundation, – core of the parousia christology!

In contemporary Protestant publications, and less clearly in some Catholic publications, there is a tendency to identify Jesus' resurrection with the renewal of life and the faith of Jesus' disciples, and with its proclamation. In my book I disassociate myself completely from this identification. But before denouncing the one-sidedness of this tendency, one should first ask if one has not come upon an aspect of the truth which others have unjustly passed by without heeding it. In the past, the resurrection not infrequently functioned as an 'event in itself' without any saving relation to us human persons. It was presented 'objectively'. Over and against this 'empirical' objectivism, in which one would receive insight into Jesus' resurrection outside the act of faith, and therefore outside a faith experience, a reaction was appropriate. According to the stories of the appearances, Jesus 'appears', not to 'the world' or to unbelievers, but only to believers (see also John 14.19). This must already attune us to reflection. Resurrection and resurrection faith are not identical, but [079]
one cannot separate them either. In my book I propose: 'Certain exegetical theologians give the impression that resurrection and belief in the resurrection are one and the same; in other words, that the resurrection did not happen in the person of Jesus but only, as it were, in the minds of the believing disciples. That makes "resurrection" a symbolic renewal of life, albeit triggered by the expression of the disciples' inspiration they drew from the

earthly Jesus' (I, 644f.). However I explicitly say of this hypothesis: 'This interpretation strikes me as foreign to both to the New Testament and the major Christian traditions. I dissociate myself from it completely' (I, 645). After reading this text, W. Löser nonetheless dares to write: 'For Schillebeeckx, the Easter experience is an experience, the "subject" of which is the disciples themselves and their new state of consciousness after Jesus' death',[41] and according to me, the Easter experience would be 'not the experience of a new creative act of God in the crucified Jesus' (op. cit.). One rubs one's eyes when one reads something like that. The aim of my book is precisely to emphasize both the objective and the subjective aspect of resurrection faith over against all objective and subjective one-sidedness, and in such a way that the 'object' – Jesus' personal-corporeal resurrection and exaltation to God's side – and the 'subject' – the faith experience which in scripture is expressed in the story of the appearances – cannot be separated.[42] Without the Christian faith experience, we lack any sense organ which can give us insight into Jesus' resurrection. But also the other way around: without the personal resurrection of Jesus, there can be no Christian Easter faith experience either. Therefore the fact that Jesus is risen never exclusively means that he was raised from the dead by God but, at the same time and just as essentially, that God gives him a community or church in the dimension of our history. It means at the same time that the exalted Jesus is actively present among us. This indicates the salvific significance of Jesus' resurrection for us. Precisely in and through the experience of this renewed presence among them, the disciples experienced that Jesus is risen. Therefore resurrection is at the same time the sending of the Spirit and the reassembling of the scattered disciples, in this sense: the formation of a particular church, a brotherhood. Coming from the Father, Jesus
[080] is living and present among his own in a new way. It is precisely in the faith-inspired Easter experience – Jesus' new presence and their renewal of life – that what has happened to Jesus himself is expressed: resurrection. Consequently, in my book I wanted to avoid the two obstacles of empiricism and fideism. Resurrection and the saving presence of Jesus in the midst of his own on earth are one and the same reality with different aspects, so that *in* the experienced saving presence, Jesus' being risen 'appears': 'shows' itself before the eyes of believers. This very structure is graphically expressed in the appearance stories. 'In that day (= Easter) you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you' (John 14.20; see 14.23b). For the disciples, the Easter event is baptism with Holy Spirit by the Lamb – the 'prophet' – who takes away the sin of the world, and as a result the disciples themselves are also sent into the

[41] W. Löser, op. cit., 265.

[42] In a special way P. Schoonenberg has also pointed out this essential connection in *Wege nach Emmaus. Unser Glaube an die Auferstehung Jesu*, Graz 1974.

world to proceed further with 'the service of reconciliation' ('the appearances' are at the same time and, in their present form, even essentially mission visions). If I call the Easter experience a conversion process, one may not forget the all-encompassing cognitive aspect of it, namely the experience of the new (pneumatic or spiritual) presence of the risen Jesus in the regrouped community! For me, this is precisely the key element of this entire conversion process.

It seems clear to me that the New Testament refers to an existing conversion model that is expressed in terms of 'appearances', in order to express this entire experiential complex, fruit of God's grace in and through the risen Jesus. Now one does have to admit that the constant and stereotyped elements of a model do not *per se* have to belong only to the model, but can also be part of the narrated events themselves.[43] To put it another way: encountering even perfect parallels, e.g. in the intertestamental literature, does not *per se* mean that the New Testament presents them as non-historical elements, even though parallels can indeed be a great help in the interpretation of the unique nature of experiences like those of appearances, an empty tomb, etc. In view of the

[43]This is rightly pointed out by A. Descamps, op. cit., 222 (the difference between 'visions' as a literary procedure and as historical-psychological documentation), as well as by P. Schoonenberg, in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 15, 1975, 262. Descamps does forget to say here that in the gospel story of the 'appearances' the psychic structure of what is biblically called a *vision* is completely lacking: there is no mention here of ecstatic and really visionary elements. The appearing Jesus is presented as speaking and even eating with his own, as being present among them in the same way as Peter and the others are together – only 'a bit more rarified.' Therefore the appeal to biblical *visions* seems to me to be less relevant here. The gospel story is more in line with e.g. the Old Testament appearance of the angel in the book of Tobit or the appearance of 'the three strangers' (three and yet one) to Abraham. It is less a 'Christophany' than an 'epiphany of Christ.' I do have to admit that my interpretation of the visual moment in the (also cognitive) conversion turnabout of the disciples, as redundancy aspect of a cognitive and emotive happening, goes more in the direction of the 'visionary.' Therefore this explanation does not do justice either to the unique literary genre of the four gospels in this respect. I am more concerned with a theological clarification for modern people, through which it becomes understandable why the first Christians seized on the model of Old Testament appearances of God and angels in order to express their Easter experience. In addition, I will also admit that this need not even be a pure model, but can also imply a historical event. Nonetheless, in addition I point out the analysis (then unknown to me) by J. Lindblom, *Geschichte und Offenbarung,* Lund 1968, 66 (see also: A. Strobel, 'Vision im NT', in RGG[3] VI, 1410-1412), from which it appears that also in the New Testament the visual is never a source of kerygma, but merely a medium for receiving and articulating a revelation. In the Gospel of John, faith-inspired seeing is even a pure theological-reflexive category. The analysis by K. Kienzler, published later as *Logik der Auferstehung,* Freiburg 1976, interpreting Jesus' appearances as testimonies to himself, is also a valuable contribution in this light: what is the unique logic of our speaking about Christ's resurrection? For him, this is a performative witness. Even though I put the emphasis more on the experiential foundation of this witness, Kienzler nonetheless comes very close to what I intend to say. – It seems to me to be a historical certainty that shortly after Jesus' death a few people claim to have seen Jesus. There is no reason to question this assertion. There is reason, however, to study critically what they really meant when they said this, for 'revelation', articulated in terms of 'seeing', is a fundamental biblical datum, and where it occurs one must determine, each time according to the context, precisely what is meant by this 'seeing'. I will not say any more (now also compare J. Lindblom, op. cit., 101-104, whose work I did not know when I wrote my first Jesus book).

nature of the human person in ancient culture – and with A. Descamps I would now also want to add to this: given the data from the history of salvation 'from Genesis to Revelation' – it does not seem to me at all necessary to deny visual elements in this Easter experience of the first Christians. The Easter grace
[081] engaged their heart and senses, and their senses via heart and mind. It would indeed witness to one-sided rationality if one were to remove all emotional aspects from this experiential event. Additional effects, even visual, seem to me to be obvious for these people within their culture, while the existing model itself already points to them; in other words, the models too usually come into being only on the basis of specific historical experiences. But these additional visual phenomena are not the main point; these are at best an emotion-filled sign of what really happened to the disciples, taking them off guard: the experience of Jesus' new saving presence in the midst of his own on earth. And the point is what presented itself in this experience. But is the experience of the presence of the Lord, and thus the unique *metanoia* experience such as the disciples underwent it after Jesus' death, and through which they became Christians by grace, not *per se* also a very emotive, 'pathic' event? If anywhere, then here an inexpressible *pati divina* took place, the basis of new community formation, by the power of the risen Jesus who is present among his disciples, once again gathered together. This renewed assembly of the disciples, scattered after Jesus' death, is the fruit of the new presence of the now glorified Jesus. The visual element in what had been the Easter experience takes on a pregnant significance as redundancy element when one underlines the cognitive aspect in the conversion process, which is implied in the Christian titles given to or the identification of Jesus (see above, Chapter 2 (a)). In my first Jesus book, I was dealing with this cognitive aspect in the conversion process. In no way do I say that what the New Testament intends with 'seeing Jesus' is identical with the acquisition of a new self-understanding! The renewed cognitive element with its visual redundancy is intentionally applied to the dead but risen Jesus and, precisely in this, at the same time provides a renewal of life and a new self-understanding.

From the perspective of this broad insight, allow me to analyse some criticisms of details now, for every detail seems to me to be important in this central material. To be considered above all are the reflections of A. Descamps, the exegete who has most extensively gone into this central issue in my first Jesus
[082] book. His criticism, which only concerns some historical aspects, does not affect my basic hypothesis. On the contrary, with Descamps there is not even any essential difference between his exegesis and mine regarding the content of the appearance texts. He too accepts the other essential elements in the Easter experience alongside the visionary element, namely the conversion process, the memories of Jesus' life's work on earth, remorse for their panicky

attitude during Jesus' arrest and death, confidence in God as a God of the living, the tradition of the humiliated and exalted prophet, and finally the role of Peter in reassembling the disciples.[44] The only difference between the two of us lies in this: the exegete Descamps gives the visual aspect a historically more precise place than I do within the whole of what I call the conversion process, though he admits that the risen Christ 'physically showed himself ' in no 'sign' at all – whether this be the empty tomb, the appearances, or a (cognitive) conversion process (my position).[45] The latter was precisely my concern. That was the reason why, in my book, I deliberately kept silent about possible visual elements in the conversion process or the Easter experience. My intention here was to free this visual element from the heavy dogmatic significance which some attach to it, namely of being the foundation of the whole of the Christian faith.[46] I now realize that it would have been better for me to have discussed this visual element in the book itself, and there had already pointed out its, indeed, historical-psychological value, but at the same time its extremely low dogmatic value. However, Descamps seems to suppose rather hastily that fortunately there are no longer any believers for whom the empirical establishment of a physically seen Christ would be the foundation of Christian faith.[47] For what Descamps calls a long obsolete position is precisely the 'Christian norm' and 'orthodox' perspective from which certain sarcastic pamphlets (which I do not treat in this little book) criticize my Jesus book!

Nonetheless, differences between Descamps and myself remain. For Descamps, the visionary element is that which the scripture texts straightforwardly give us to read, while the hypothesis of the – also cognitive – conversion process is, for him, a responsible, accurate deduction, but not immediately perceptible in the scripture texts. From a historico-literary point of view, right is indeed more on his side; but this does not make any difference [083] for me systematically. Precisely here emerges a legitimate distinction between exegete and theologian. I myself admit that the New Testament indeed talks of 'seeing' (visions, appearances); one would have to be blind not to acknowledge

[44] Descamps, op. cit., 221-222.

[45] 'En effet, du point de vue de la foi, "tombeau vide" et "apparitions" ne sont pas des signes d'un *tout* autre ordre que "expérience de conversion". Dans aucun de ses signes, le ressuscité n'est "montré " physiquement' (Descamps, op. cit., 221).

[46] After the publication of my first Jesus book, when I was asked whether I would, then, deny all visual elements as historical-psychological happenings in what the New Testament calls 'appearances of Jesus', I refuted this from the very beginning, though adding that *this visual element* cannot be the foundation of the Christian (resurrection) faith (see: *De Bazuin* 58, 1975, 18 March, p. 2; and H. Kuitert and E. Schillebeeckx, *Jezus van Nazaret en het heil van de wereld,* Baarn 1975, 51-52, a transcription of a television debate).

[47] After the previous text (footnote 45), Descamps says: 'A moins de supposer, – *comme on l'a fait souvent, mais plus guère aujourd'hui* – que la vision du ressuscité fut, non pas un acte de foi, mais la perception d'une évidence expérimentale, auquel cas la résurrection serait, *non un dogme*, mais le *fondement* indiscutable des dogmes' (op. cit., 221). I am precisely concerned with this so-called obsolete – in fact virulently living – position.

that. I also admit that, apart from the stories about Paul's conversion, there is no conversion *terminology* to be found in the gospel stories of the appearances to Peter and the others. Nonetheless, some hints in this direction can be found in the texts themselves *(i.a.,* I, 379-92). For that reason, I myself would not want to speak of just a responsible deduction, as the exegete Descamps does, but of an echo of an original conversion event which, in the process of development from appearance stories to explicit mission appearances, has indeed receded into the background. In a very analogous way one can compare it with the line running from Acts 9 through Acts 22 to Acts 26, in which, in the judgment of many exegetes, a conversion event (Acts 9 and 22) is transformed into an almost exclusively mission event (Acts 26). I admit that it was precisely these three stories – also with regard to the stories of the appearances to Peter and the Eleven – which made me search in the direction of 'appearances' as originally more pronounced conversion stories than is clear in the final scriptural redaction. Even though, historically, the accents could probably be rightly placed elsewhere than where I have placed them, I cannot comprehend as a systematic theologian how the position of my conversion hypothesis implies any minimization of Easter christology. Of course in this hypothesis all the initiative originates from the risen Christ; see I, 646, where the logical and ontological priority of Jesus' personal, corporeal resurrection to belief in the resurrection is explicitly affirmed. Apart from that, at any rate, A. Descamps in no way accuses me of such minimizing.

I also find it striking that, according to the exegete Descamps, the most original feature of my first Jesus book is that it has made clearer that the general idea of 'eternal life' of the crucified one, together with the conviction that this crucified one would return very soon 'with power' (parousia christology of the eschatological prophet, see Acts 1.6), did indeed historically precede the more precise idea of the corporeal resurrection of Jesus.[48] This indeed was the position of my first Jesus book. But Descamps immediately
[084] adds that this later precision came about very quickly, and did so on the basis of the historical ascertaining of both the empty tomb and the appearances. I have no reason at all to deny this because, according to my book as well, parousia christology implicitly contains what resurrection christology explicitly expresses. In his reconstruction of my schema, this exegete says that, according to my book, the genesis of resurrection faith would have occurred as follows: (a) after the death of Jesus, there was the experience of conversion to the recognition of the dead Jesus as the living one; (b) this was then followed by the identification of Jesus with the humiliated and exalted eschatological prophet, in which the unique mode of Jesus' life-after-death and his exaltation

[48] Descamps, op. cit., 220.

come to be expressed in a still vague manner; (c) then follow the four early Christian credal tendencies (Descamps speaks of creeds), of which only the fourth – the Easter christology, which according to me would also be the most recent – elaborates the precise idea of resurrection for the first time; (d) only later would this elaborated idea come to be expressed in images of 'appearances', and (e) still later become the object of the appearance stories as they now appear in the New Testament, in particular, 'anachronistically' placed a few days after Jesus' death and in the following days.[49] Although Descamps claims that this representational schema in and of itself is perfectly reconcilable with the Christian faith, in other words, that caviling about 'heresy' or 'orthodoxy' is out of place in this interpretation, he nonetheless challenges the historical validity of this reconstruction, adding that denying historical aspects can influence the Christian understanding of faith. He does admit that, in the case of Peter who plays the leading role in the 'appearance stories', faith in the living Christ remained below the level of faith in a 'physical resurrection'.[50] He only denies that this more precise idea would have arisen only after a long process, which moreover I nowhere say.

However, throughout the whole of this reconstruction of my book's manner of presentation, I cannot entirely recognize myself. Nevertheless, as abstract schematization, and therefore without the chronological order introduced by Descamps, I do agree on the whole with his reconstruction.[51] But Descamps loses sight of the fact that, for me, this schema is no development of a single homogeneous early Christian community, but that I assume originally different early communities, at least in the sense of early Christian traditions from different regions of Palestine, where Jesus had been everywhere. So effective criticism should attack this presupposition of mine beforehand. In my [085] book I even devoted a separate explanation precisely to this problem of the "Easter experience" in addition to many other sporadic remarks about it ('Ambiguity of the term 'Easter experience',' I, 392-7). Maranatha christology is also an inherently Easter experience, albeit without any explicit thought of resurrection. I admit that the following assertion remains a hypothesis, at least for the beginning of Christianity: that, from the very beginning, different

[49] Ibid., 220-221.

[50] '... en deçà de l'idée précise de résurrection physique' [… and below the precise idea of physical resurrection] (op. cit., 221).

[51] With the exception, however, of b) especially. Although in his entire book review, Descamps does not go into what for me is a fundamental idea regarding the 'eschatological prophet' (apparently because he agrees with it), he nonetheless distorts the image to a certain extent because, according to my two Jesus books, the *presumption* of Jesus' being the eschatological prophet seems to be already a given before Easter. The reconstruction of my line of thought is more accurately reproduced by L. Bakker, 'Het oudtestamentisch tegoed van de christelijke theologie', in *Proef en Toets. Theologie als Experiment,* KTHA Amsterdam, Amersfoort 1977 (86-102), especially 89-96.

'Christian communities' existed and therefore one cannot assume the one Jerusalem mother church; but it seems to me historically undeniable that here and there, in places where Jesus had been, separate developments of tradition about Jesus came into being – in essence, this is the point. My perspective on what happened in no way, therefore, excludes, but rather includes the fact that in specific early Christian traditions, belief in the resurrection of Jesus was the starting point of the entire development,[52] while in other traditions the conviction of 'the Coming One' was the point of origin of all further development, so that here the resurrection was not the object of proclamation at first. In this maranatha christology the resurrection was implied, however not explicitly presupposed, as many groundlessly presume. This is the reason why, when proponents of a parousia christology came in contact with traditions of another orientation, namely explicit resurrection traditions, they could spontaneously acknowledge their own faith vision in them. But then, this mutual influence of diverse traditions was also the condition for the resurrection generally being proclaimed as object of preaching (I, 397). So I am speaking about an 'Easter experience' common to all early Christian traditions, but I deny that the element of articulation or interpretation was the same in all the original traditions. Thus, for example, in Judaism and the intertestamental period, the corporeal resurrection was only one possible way of presenting the real being-with-God of a prophet martyred to death (I, 518-23). In short, what Descamps reads in my book according to a chronological development within one Christian community, I see rather as the merging of various original traditions of a divergent kind, which are, however, often difficult to re-
[086] construct chronologically. Thus, what was a later addition for one tradition is much older for another tradition. Then a precise reconstruction of the chronology often becomes impossible and often remains almost hypothetical. In my book, I already posited this in advance as fundamental, principally in connection with the demand for *ipsissima verba et facta Jesu,* for what is secondary or redactional in one specific witness (e.g. Mark) can be 'authentic Jesus' in other traditions (I, 84-5).

There is still one topic related to Easter christology which I have thus far insufficiently explicitly treated, namely, the real historical significance of what is termed the motif of the 'empty tomb.' Of the exegetes of this motif, the exegete-theologian A. Descamps goes further than any other exegete in quite explicitly saying: 'a corpse which has disappeared is not a resuscitated body,[53] ('un cadavre disparu n'est pas un corps ressuscité'; even though this

[52] This is also explicitly demonstrated by G. Schille in a study which appeared after my first Jesus book had already gone to press (*Osterglaube,* Stuttgart 1973), albeit in my opinion systematically exaggerrated.

[53] Descamps, op. cit., 218.

expression, with no mention of the corporeal person, is an intolerable dualism). In other words, as I myself propose in my book, the historical tomb which is found to be empty can never be the foundation of the Christian resurrection faith. Therefore, in the New Testament problem regarding the empty tomb, it does not directly concern matters of faith, but rather the question of what really happened historically around Jesus' grave. In my book I myself propose that the tradition of the tomb is a very old tradition, in contrast to a specific tendency in exegesis (I, 703 n. 32). The New Testament relevance of the tomb may not be denied too quickly. The fact that, for me, philosophically, an empty tomb is no evidence for a resurrection, does indeed play a role in my view of the New Testament. But in no sense is this a predetermining factor, although it does direct the research and the interpretation. One cannot object to this as long as the data of the biblical text are not manipulated on the basis of this pre-conception.

In my first Jesus book, with a great deal of hesitation (see I, 331, n. 30 [n. 2 in Collected Works]), I opted for a familiar exegesis of this topic, namely for a cultic legend (pilgrimages to the tomb of a revered 'hero', of which there are numerous examples in antiquity), albeit with reluctance, because the material presented by a few modern exegetes seemed to me to be insufficient and of too late a date, although even now I do not want to exclude this hypothesis completely. The philosophico-theological opinion that it is not theologically relevant whether or not Jesus' tomb[54] was empty did play a certain role in my interpretation. But, from the perspective of this non-relevance for us, to decide [087] that therefore the motif of the tomb had no relevance for the first Christians either, seems unjustified. Both the persistence and the antiquity of the New Testamental tomb motif unmistakably contradicts this. That is why, in my first Jesus book, I was looking for the nature of the relevance an empty tomb could have in those times. I found two elements: (a) a specifically Jewish tradition which did indeed associate corporeal resurrection, or exaltation to God's side on what were then anthropological grounds, with 'the disappearance of the corpse'; and (b) the possibility of a cultic legend built around a tomb, as a plausible hypothesis. This is not convincing, while there are probably still other and more justifiable explanations to be found which historically still escape us.

Since then a study by John E. Alsup has been published, which does bring

[54] Of course there is the historical question of whether Jesus, as one who had been crucified, could have been buried in an *individual* grave. Historically, Roman crucifixions usually precluded this, even though there seem to have been exceptions. The initiative taken by Joseph of Arimathea, who asks Pilate for Jesus' body and also received it according to the synoptic tradition (Mark 15.43-45; Matt. 27.58; Luke 23.50-53) as well as according to the Johannine tradition (John 19.38), does nonetheless have signs warranting its historicity, despite parallels of this story from that time.

some clarity, but nonetheless still leaves the exegetical dispute open.[55] Alsup presents a close reading of the text which does not need to appeal to a cultic legend. This seems to me to be the great advantage, given the unique character of the New Testamental texts. By means of his analysis, it becomes even clearer that the motif of the tomb is indeed very old. At the same time, however, it appears from this – and this is the gain – that initially this motif precisely did not function within a resurrection context. On the contrary, the empty tomb had only negative consequences: it led, not to triumphant hope in resurrection, but to desperation and despondency. In his study, Alsup discovered three strata in the New Testament motif of the tomb. Specific sections of the Johannine text (John 20.1-2; 20.11-13) most probably provide us with the oldest form of the motif of the tomb (what also corresponds with the findings of my second Jesus book, especially that, for Jesus' last days in Jerusalem, John's Gospel contains even more reliable historical elements than the synoptics). In this oldest form, the motif is only associated with Mary Magdalene and possibly other women. Then we would have the synoptic form of that same story in Mark 16.1-6,8, in which theological reflection has appeared. And finally there is the story of the tomb oriented around Peter (John 20.3-10 and Luke 24.12). Alsup then proposes that a tomb motif without angel is the tradition's oldest datum, and that precisely this discovery of an empty tomb was in no sense a summons to resurrection faith but, on the contrary, to anxiety. Historically, this seems to have been the first 'tomb experience'. This
[088] old tradition was subsequently integrated into traditions involving appearances, namely through the medium of appearances of Jesus and no longer of an angel or a young man to women (Matt. 28.9-10). Luke knows the two traditions, but leaves them unconnected, side by side. The final conclusion, then, would be: the tradition involving appearances is historically independent of the tradition involving the tomb, as well as of the tradition of the Easter kerygma.[56] In other words, according to this analysis by Alsup, the discovery of an empty tomb, on which A. Descamps also insists,[57] is historically difficult to deny, but at the same time it seems that, historically, this fact has had no essential significance for the resurrection faith's coming into existence. The finding of an empty tomb became significant for resurrection only when it was integrated into other early Christian traditions. This analysis still leaves a lot open, but nonetheless it shows that what we consider to be a theologically irrelevant historical datum, by means of integration into other traditions, could substantially have had a special significance for people of that time. For even though the first reaction was anxiety and desperation, one can then also say

[55] John E. Alsup, *The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel Tradition,* Stuttgart 1975.
[56] Ibid., 147.
[57] Descamps, op. cit., 217-218.

with Decamps[58] that this datum was an initial shock, which therefore has not led to the resurrection faith; but this shock was associated with originally independent traditions involving appearances (this is the added precision which Alsup contributes) and could therefore in itself validly count as symbolic support for the resurrection faith at that time. And this most especially for certain Jews for whom a corporeal resurrection has something to do with the lot of the corpse itself. According to another Jewish tradition, at the end of time or at the general resurrection, the new, heavenly body, coming down out of heaven was the saints' gift of grace.[59]

One final remark, to round off my response to Descamps' sympathetic critical review of the exegetical section of my first Jesus book. Although he even praises my detailed exegesis in general, this *ex professo* exegete is nonetheless of the opinion that my exegesis is too much oriented towards a later subsequent theological systematization; in other words, that it is a 'committed exegesis',[60] and even more: an exegesis serving an already presupposed christology,[61] so that the theologian 'who rightly will not subject himself to the magisterium of the exegete' instead subjects the exegesis to the magisterium of the theologian! To this let me respond first of all that, in any case, this is contrary to my explicit fundamental statement of principles. Descamps requires an exegete to do research 'without knowing exactly where [089] it will lead to'; well, I explicitly stated: that I want to do research exegetically 'without knowing in advance where [it] would take me . . .' (I, 34) – precisely what he requires of a fair exegesis! But naturally, in spite of solemn statements of principles, someone can use them inconsistently. But then the accuser bears the burden of proof. In fact, however, it would be difficult for me to work toward an already presupposed christology, namely a parousia christology of the eschatological prophet (my standpoint in my first Jesus book), because this only became clear at the end of the study, and even then still with a certain vagueness of which the book still bears traces. But once this result became clear, in order to improve the internal structure of the book during the final redaction, I worked insertions into the preceding sections which prelude the final conclusion. This is the privilege of every final redaction, whereby the *ordo expositionis* differs from the actual *ordo inventionis*. Such generalized reproaches usually do not provide any real help. Moreover, Descamps forgets one

[58] Ibid, 218.

[59] Descamps' remarks especially (op. cit., 218) have made it clear to me that I have neglected Mark's story about Jesus' burial (Mark 15.38-47) too much, although this exegete himself says that much about this still remains hypothetical for him as well (op. cit., 218). For this reason, it seems to me that, up to now, the historical problem of the motif of the empty tomb has not been sufficiently clarified exegetically, even though every further clarification will have to proceed from the historically very old motif of this New Testament tradition.

[60] Descamps, op. cit., 215-216.

[61] Ibid.

fundamental datum, which I explicitly explained in I, 38-39, namely that I make a distinction between literary-critical exegesis and 'theological' exegesis, which, while making use of the entire literary-critical, scientific method, is really in search of God's salvific manifestations (I, 39, see the entire context). I am not saying that Descamps, as a faith-inspired Christian, does not ultimately also do this same thing, but then the critical question which he puts to me, and which, for example, a reviewer puts to Descamps in return, also applies to him: 'Descamps himself is also dependent on philosophical and dogmatic presuppositions.'[62] Therefore, in connection with the so-called exegetical and theological 'magisterium', I would like to add that however much 'theological exegesis' may rely on fair literary-critical exegesis, it nonetheless rejects every patronization of science as the final answer. For science as such does not recognize the category of God's saving acting in our history; it can establish that and how people speak about God, and how this speaking is also determined by their own culture. Without *a priori* wanting to restrict God's possibilities, a contemporary theological exegesis can therefore come to other
[090] conclusions than, e.g., someone who studies the same literary texts from a differently oriented theological perspective regarding God's manifestations, while nonetheless they both will have to acknowledge what the texts actually say and how these speak about God. Consequently, modern theological ideas play a unique role in a modern theological exegesis – how could it be any different? – as has happened throughout all time. But in my opinion, this is substantially different from the use of exegesis in theological handbooks, which only serves to 'illustrate' an already preconceived christology. So I decisively reject Descamps' casual remark that my exegesis is at the service of an already preconceived christology, and can personally testify that precisely the act of openly approaching an analysis of the texts at the origins of Christianity is leading me towards the articulation of a christological synthesis, the contours of which I still do not even have completely in sight, let alone that this was the presupposition of my exegesis!

Let me now turn my attention from the rather positive exegetical criticism to the criticism by theologians of this central section of my first Jesus book. W. Kasper and W. Löser especially deserve comment in this regard. Löser especially asserts that I give priority to the Q tradition and the pre-Marcan tradition, in order to be able to relativize the Easter kerygma (see what I already said above). There is no basis at all for this interpretation in my book, though there is in the in themselves legitimate anxieties and concerns of these reviewers, who apparently see Christians around them who deny the resurrection of Jesus and only want to adopt a 'moralizing' approach, that is to

[62] B. Lauret, op. cit., in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 61, 1977, 601.

interpret him in terms of social criticism.[63] It took some time before it became clear to me how theologians such as Löser and Kasper could read my book so contrary to its intended putpose. The reason is, namely, that they have read it through the lens of the discussion centering around R. Pesch, which was published at the end of 1973 in the Tübinger *Theologische Quartalschrift;*[64] both refer to it.[65] Neither of these two seems to have realized that I could not yet have known these articles (and therefore that they could not be quoted by me; what is more, Kasper calls this failure to quote 'astonishing'!), because my first Jesus book was then already at press. Consequently, this Tübingen discussion has had no influence at all on my first Jesus book, though both reviewers nonetheless read my book through the lens of that discussion, and as a result [091] become blind to what I myself say and therefore to the essential differences between R. Pesch and my Jesus book in this: namely, both blame me for believing that the resurrection faith would be merely interpretation of the pre-Easter Jesus. In no way at all do I deny that this plays a major role in the development of the resurrection faith, as A. Descamps also admits; I even strongly emphasize this. But I have also added that this is radically insufficient: after Jesus' death there must have been new experiences, indeed a new offer of salvation, in order to be able to lay a Christian foundation for parousia and Easter christology (I, 645f.). How does one reconcile this with what W. Löser and W. Kasper impute to me?[66] I can only understand this from the perspective of a by no means illegitimate fear, on the basis of which my book is read by him through the lens of tendencies foreign to me.[67] In addition, I had previously already explained that and how the account of Jesus' life's work as well as the church's Easter kerygma were understood in the New Testament concept of *euangelion* (I, 107-114 esp. 111). To what extent may a reviewer presuppose that an author continuously diverges from what he has explicitly proposed for himself as a matter of basic principle, unless he can point to

[63] Löser immediately associates the reduction of the Easter kerygma which I would bring about with the 'moralizing of faith' (op. cit., 264) and with: 'The acting person now has the salvation which is to help him out of his need, bringing it about himself through orthopraxis´ (ibid.). This explanation borders on the incredible, given the tone of my first as well as my second Jesus book. Pluralism of anxieties? Furthermore, here 'orthopraxis' is apparently identified with 'therefore, without grace'.

[64] *Theologische Quartalschrift,* Tübingen, 153, 1973, 201-228.

[65] W. Kasper, op. cit., 359; W. Löser, op. cit., 266.

[66] Kasper does later admit 'it has more to do with a *new* and *different* happening than his suffering and death, with a happening which establishes a completely new mode of existence, on the basis of which Jesus, definitively united with God, is with us in a new way´ (op. cit., 359B), but apparently this has no further consequence at all for his negative evaluation.

[67] By this I do not in any way want to deny the fruitfulness of hypotheses such as R. Pesch's for the problem under discussion: as I see it, provided critically understood, they are an *essential part* of what I, in my book, call the *Easter experience*. I myself point out that the interpretation of Jesus' earthly life's work is an essential element of the Easter experience (I, 393f), but that the Easter experience includes more.

actual inconsistencies?

Furthermore, there is yet another misunderstanding. One cannot identify 'Easter christology' with Pauline christology. In many places Paul reacts against an Easter christology which is foreign to him, i.e. a theology of Christians who are of the opinion that with Jesus' resurrection, Christians too are already risen and have nothing more to look forward to eschatologically (I Cor. 15.12; even Paul would have difficulty with Eph. 2.6 and Col. 1.13; I, 432-437, see II, 193-196). And these Easter christologies contested by Paul appear not to have been later excesses, but a tendency with which Paul had already been confronted early on. Precisely from the entire context of I Cor. 15, in which Paul takes up the pre-Pauline resurrection kerygma, it appears that he makes this kerygma part of the older parousia christology (I Cor. 15.12-19; 15.20-28 and above all 15.23). Even more, as the only one in the entire New Testament, he dares to say in this regard that ultimately even Jesus will hand back his dominion to God (I Cor. 15.24-25; the latter, however, as Christian salvation, has no consequences for our earthly history, since the laying down
[092] of Jesus' dominion is an eschatological event and therefore does not imply a provisional significance of Jesus within history). My position in my book is that neither the Q tradition – i.e. a christology which would know no resurrection christology but only a parousia christology based on Jesus' message and praxis – nor an Easter christology which was interpreted in the sense that Jesus' own prophetic message, mighty deeds and praxis would have no dogmatic significance, are in fact canonical (I, 436-437; see I, 640-643). The actual canon includes many early Christian tendencies which I have summarized in four tendential creeds; and within these tendencies, Jesus' message, sayings, mighty deeds and praxis or way of life, as well as his death and the community experiences after his death (thematized in the parousia christology and Easter christology) are essential. Jesus' message and way of life, without parousia christology or Easter christology, is the nth exponent of a dead utopianism in a mankind with no further perspective of hope; I say that explicitly in I, 642 and II, 845. But on the other hand, an Easter christology apart from that message and praxis is a myth (I, 642-643; I, 437-438; see I, 52-62; and I, 403-404, etc.). The canonical Bible has made a synthesis and this is the norm of any Christian theology. In no sense does this have anything to do with a priority of 'Jesus of Nazareth' over the 'Easter Christ': that is a contrast foreign to me. But for me it does have to do with the historical datum that 'Easter christology' is predicated of Jesus of Nazareth, consequently of this person with this message and this specific praxis or way of life and this death – and not of a Mr X. Precisely the isolation of the Easter christology from the concrete horizon within which this creed originated (namely, both Jesus' life's work and the Old Testament expectation of the kingdom of God, in which

eschatological figures would act as mediators) has neutralized the critical power of Christianity over the centuries and could make it an ally of 'the powers of this world'. I do indeed emphasize this danger. But I wonder where in my book a reduction of the Easter mystery is to be found,[68] while I only want to make an intrinsic connection between precisely this Easter christology and what Jesus historically really was, said and did!

Ultimately, Kasper and Löser want a 'formalized' Easter christology, more Bultmannian than they themselves want, and for Kasper evidently in reaction against his own other publications. But a formalized Easter christology – whether religious or politicized – is foreign to the New Testament. [093]

(c) Prolegomena, not yet christology

(i) Misunderstandings associated with 'first' and 'second order' expressions of faith

A few reviewers have raised objections about this terminology (I, 547-548).[69] First of all, I must say that this distinction has nothing to do with the threefold distinction which I make elsewhere, namely between fact-constituted history, conjunctural history and structural history (I, 577f.). This terminology has wrongly given some the impression that 'second order' statements would therefore have a 'second-rate' significance in value judgments. I explicitly wanted to avoid this interpretation, for I said, 'without this meaning "second-rate" truths of faith' (I, 549); but nonetheless it was, *pour besoin de la cause*, otherwise interpreted anyway. That is why I omitted this terminology from my first Jesus book in the second; whenever I go into experience and interpretations more extensively (II, 27-79). The conclusions which especially W. Löser and W. Kasper associate with this terminology have no basis at all in my book. Their incorrect interpretation is then also intrinsically connected with their already mistaken notion of what I call Easter christology (see above). For indeed if this is only a faith interpretation of Jesus' life's work,[70] and is not also founded on specific new experiences after Jesus' death (namely, the experience in faith of the living presence of the risen Jesus in the community, as a cognitive nucleus of what I call Easter experience as conversion process), all statements of faith which I call 'of the second order' do also become substantially second-rate in value. But in my book the experience of Jesus' glorified presence in the community has its own structure, which is not

[68] Thus Löser, op. cit., 264.

[69] Especially W. Löser, op. cit., 263; W. Kasper, op. cit., 358B, and to a lesser degree A. Weiser, in *Lebendiges Zeugnis* 31, 1976, (73-85) 82f.; W. Breuning, in *Theologische Revue* 73, 1977, no. 2, (89-95) 91-92, and L. Renwart, *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 109, 1977, 224-229.

[70] Thus W. Kasper, 'The real Easter experience consists in the recognition and acknowledgement of the totality of the life of Jesus as revelation of God' (op. cit., 359). For me (see above), it is true, this is an essential aspect of the Easter experience, but not the only one.

identical with the structure of the faith interpretation of Jesus' life's work (see above). But on the other hand, neither can this uniqueness be intelligible if it is separated from the memory of the interpretive experience in the social intercourse of the disciples with the pre-Easter Jesus. Despite the uniqueness of
[094] the structure of the Easter experience, one nonetheless cannot make it stand on its own as a properly differentiated second source of faith knowledge of Jesus, as if both the account of Jesus' earthly life's work and the Easter experience would be a twofold source of knowledge in faith. Precisely this seems to me to be the core of truth in the 'Tübingen discussion', published after my first Jesus book, which is present in R. Pesch's position, and which therefore one should honour. For when one makes a proper distinction of both, one is really already thinking along the lines of the 'formalized' kerygma christology, contested by me, in which the account or the *anamnesis* of Jesus' prophetic life's work is pushed to the background as a matter of course, and is actually no longer very important. Precisely because of the uniqueness and intrinsically essential connection of the so-called 'two sources' of faith knowledge of Jesus, in other words, because of the unique structure of faith in the earthly Jesus who is confessed as the coming, but already risen from the dead, glorified Jesus, the use of the ('linguistic analysis') terminology of 'first-' and 'second-order' statements can indeed be misunderstood, at least if one does not repeatedly remember the unique structure of faith along with this. But in the chapter in which I use this terminology (I, 546-50), I start from the personal identification of Jesus (I, 548), which therefore already implies the Easter experience. I then go on to say that a personal identification 'could be intensified' (I, 548), and 'second, further reflection does not actually yield any totally new insights' (ibid.). Only after that do I discuss the distinction between 'first-' and 'second-order' statements of faith. In other words, the minimal Easter statements of faith – from the perspective of historical genesis, parousia christology, followed by the resurrection kerygma shortly behind – do therefore, according to me, substantially belong to the domain of 'first-order' statements of faith. In addition, in my book the entire analysis of Jesus' death and resurrection precedes the chapter in which I begin to speak about a theology 'to the second power' (I, 546ff.). Scattered and often recapitulatory statements about a specific theme should be read in the light of the central statement about it. Consequently, in my book, 'theology of Jesus,' as basic foundation of a christology, clearly intends to say: the acknowledgement of the coming of the kingdom of God in the words and deeds of Jesus, as that came to *explicit*
[095] consciousness in and through the Easter experience. In contrast to this I spoke of christology, in the sense of theology 'to the second power', in which the attention is turned and redirected from the kingdom of God to a concentrated attention on the person of Jesus Christ himself, and the historic mediator of the

kingdom of God is identified with the pre-existent Son who brings salvation from God to earth.

In my Jesus books I want to express the fact that soteriology – the kingdom of God as salvation for man: the core of Jesus' preaching – precedes christology in the order of the genesis of christological knowledge. Even the unique Easter experience is a soteriological event.[71] Only then does the question, 'Who is he who has the power and authority to accomplish such things?,' receive its full significance. In other words, to adopt a modern Jewish distinction, the explicit 'who religion' follows the 'what religion', even though, from the very beginning, the 'who christology' is implicitly included in the 'what christology'. Seen in this way, the soteriological demand for christology is substantially a 'second-order' issue, because it already presupposes a first event, the experience of salvation with Jesus. But along with this demand, it can emerge, no longer in the order of knowledge but in the order of reality, that the personal identity of Jesus is the basic foundation of his work of redemption, and consequently 'christology' does precede soteriology. Why Kasper can then ask me in particular if a christology which is not at the same time soteriology is even possible, completely escapes me;[72] the whole tone of my two Jesus books is to show precisely that, which after all would ultimately build up a christology from and within a soteriology.[73] And precisely from the expected third volume of my trilogy concerning the experience of salvation from God in Jesus, it shall appear that the intrinsic bond between soteriology and christology is *pneumatological*. But even without this third book, it already appears from my two books that the judgment that there is a tendency in my first book to evolve 'into a future Jesuology aimed at orthopraxis'[74] is a

[71] In addition, W. Kasper apparently understands what I call 'the 'theology of Jesus of Nazareth' (I, 549) in a sense which wrongly leaves the unique soteriological moment of the Easter experience outside this concept.

[72] Kasper, op. cit., 360. It is striking that W. Dantine, 'Tendenzwende oder adaptive Beharrung? Gedanken zur gegenwartigen katholischen Christologie', in *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim* 26, 1975, 108-113, claims that I make precisely soteriology central and from there want to arrive at a christology; with this, he radically contradicts Kasper's interpretation of my book.

[73] R. Michiels admits that he did have a bit of difficulty with the real purpose of the book, but he says that after having read the second Jesus book as well, he only now properly realizes that both books are concerned with a soteriology with an eye to a christology (in *De Standaard,* 23 December 1977). This is an accurate intuition. At the same time, these difficulties in reading my text confirm that it was precisely not from a preconceived idea that I began my research, but rather 'openly', waiting to see where it would bring me. As the study progressed and perspectives became clearer, I *ordered* the material *on that basis* afterwards, during the final redaction. But this final redaction may not make the reader forget the searching '*ordo inventionis,*' in which – to be sure – a great deal was still unclear to me. Even in the final redaction, this lack of clarity can still 'be felt'. Not all misunderstanding, but a certain tense orthodox misunderstanding of (primarily my first) Jesus book seems to me, therefore, to be unjustified and without a foundation in my book.

[74] Kasper, op. cit., 360. Similar remarks by W. Löser, op. cit., 264. It is striking that Magnus Löhrer, in *Schweizerische Kirchenzeitung* 145, 1977, 7-12, who compares the christologies of Küng, Kasper and Schillebeeckx with each other, says of both Kasper and me: 'The christology is in no way

caricature. In *Jesus the Christ,* W. Kasper provides a christology which, from the very beginning, includes the entire dogma in its analysis. I, on the contrary, by means of my two Jesus books, want to lead believers towards a christology. Both perspectives are legitimate. But one cannot make one's own perspective so independent that it becomes the only legitimate theological possibility,
[096] which furthermore can take no account of other possibilities. No one has any need for theologians as well to start offering their own contribution to the increasing polarization of fronts, as if one theology were more concerned, the other less concerned, about theologically protecting the unabridged Christian faith. Apparently there is primarily a 'pluralism of anxieties'.

The experience of salvation (soteriology) thus makes us intrinsically and necessarily pose the question of Jesus' identity (christology). Linguistically speaking, one can then call christology a 'second-order' level with respect to soteriology. This in no way means that christology would be purely at the level of 'abstract reflective statements'.[75] I myself said, 'Yet neither is it (the second reflection) meant simply as "meta-language", talk about "religious talk about Jesus" in a linguistic analytical sense' (I, 548). In other words, it is no business of theology alone to make explicit the question of the true identity of Jesus as experienced salvation from God, but first and foremost, it is the business of this salvation-experiencing faith itself. Even conciliar texts are liturgical homologies; and every theologian knows that the basis of the dogma of the Trinity historically lies in the liturgical baptismal formula. I only wonder how, from my use of the terminology of 'second order' statements, W. Kasper and W. Löser dare to presume my negation of these things that are theologically obvious. The text does not provide any ground for this at all, as other reviewers also explicitly admit. I do admit that if I had I been able to foresee these misunderstandings, incomprehensible to me, I would have formulated specific passages differently, in other words, so they would have already contained an answer to these objections![76] Here apparently, even among theologians, the pluralism of concerns, anxieties and intentions reveals itself, which imposes different accents and leaves others more in the background. A genetic schema for a christology will indeed place accents differently than a

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reduced to a Jesuology' (10b), and for both Kasper and me, the unity of the earthly Jesus and the exalted Christ counts as the basic principle of all christology (op. cit., 10b).

[75] Kasper, op. cit., 360A.

[76] Naturally one can find summary statements here and there in informal passages in my book where it is said that christology is an interpretation of Jesus' life's work (such 'recapitulatory' statements by W. Kasper can also be found in his *Jesus the Christ,* Burns and Oates, 1976; that *is* christology after all! But for that reason, such remarks are not intended by Kasper nor by me to deny the unique structure of this complex interpretation and thus the unique moment of the Easter experience within it. By this I mean that a *christological* interpretation can begin only after Jesus' death, and not that this explanation is pure reflection on the pre-Easter Jesus without any formally new experiences. This would be the negation of the significance which I attach to the *metanoia* after Jesus' death.

project, which is presenting a 'complete christology' from the very beginning. But since nowadays we are still actually believing in the witness of the apostles via the mediation of the church (where W. Löser, W. Kasper and others rightly place the accent), it is very important, precisely for this reason, to gain an insight into the development of this apostolic faith. Furthermore, this approach [097] can have a critical function with regard to things that are traditionally 'taken for granted'. Theologically, this is not to mistrust the Holy Spirit who guides the Church, but rather, out of respect for this guidance, to embark on a search for the historical intermediaries in which this pneumatic guidance is present in the growth of the church. Even the social and economic aspects of this development, still neglected to too great a degree by me, would give us an even better insight into how the Spirit of God works in the ups and downs of the church. It is precisely for this reason that the historic genetic method occupies such a large place in my two Jesus books as *prolegomena* to a christology. That is also why I still call my second Jesus book a *prolegomenon* (II, 25), not rhetorically, but fully conscious of the real problematic. In this context, too, the use of the distinction between 'first' and 'second-order' statements of faith takes on its full significance. None of this has anything to do with romanticism about origins!

Finally, some criticize me wrongly if they have me pit the synoptic model against the Johannine model. B. Lauret[77] sees it correctly in his very objective analysis of my first Jesus book, when he interprets me in such a way that I wish to posit no opposition between the two models, but that I do want to recover the significance of the Synoptics and the pre-Nicene tradition within a Easter christology in order to provoke from this the real demand for possible new models (I, 559-568 and the following observations, I, 569-571). This question was indeed already raised by the great three-volume work *Das Konzil von Chalcedon* (edited by A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht). In addition, Lauret once again insists that for me christology is not purely interpretation of Jesus' life's work, but from the very beginning also includes acknowledgement of the power which comes from the risen Jesus, who lives among us and is death's conqueror. I could not agree more. I let this interpretation, evident to me, have the last word, once again through one of my critical readers who indeed has read all of this in it.

(ii) Prolegomena and the problem with I, 626-669

The reactions to the final, 'systematic' section of *Jesus* are the most divergent. On the one hand, one reads there the confession of suddenly emerging high christological orthodoxy, in clear contrast with the preceding sections. Without

[77] B. Lauret, 'Bulletin de christologie, n. 8: E. Schillebeeckx, in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 61, 1977, (596-604) 602.

any connection with the inner construction of that book in the first three
[098] sections, I would ultimately fall back on a 'classical christology' in section IV (which some then applaud, though a number insinuate with this that the first three sections could have been better omitted). On the other hand, for others, who are especially enthusiastic about the first three sections, there is disillusionment with this fourth section, that the unique dynamic and promises of those first sections does not consistently carry through.

Both reactions are understandable. Not knowing, naturally, the history of that first Jesus book, they have nonetheless intuitively sensed something of it, for the text also provokes it. For this reason I must make a confession here about this history. My first plan was to publish *Jesus* without that fourth section (at least without I, 626-69), so as then later, only as conclusion of the second Jesus book, after the analysis of the New Testament soteriologies and christologies, to arrive at a contemporary christological synthesis. I hesitated to do that only at the very last moment, feeling that without some kind of christological synthesis, the first book could have raised all kinds of fundamental questions. That is the only reason why I inserted a provisional, hasty 'systematic section' (I, 626-669, just forty pages). My book originally ended at I, 625; in other words, I, 575-625 was intended as closure of this first Jesus book: posing the actual problems which had to introduce the second Jesus book. It was only with reluctance that I inserted I, 626-669, because it was inconsistent with the gradual expansion of a christology (in I, 669-673, as a final conclusion, I wanted to restore the connection with the 'searching christology' of the preceding sections). For this reason, I am the first to say that the reader who has gone to a lot of trouble to work through the first three sections (plus I, 573-625) did indeed receive no recompense for his expectations in this almost classical and provisional insertion of I, 626-669. The work of building a bridge from academic theology to the present-day life of faith of Christians in the contemporary world was in fact briefly halted by this insertion, only in order to be taken up once again in the second Jesus book. I have deliberately made up my mind to 'pay the price', for two reasons. Firstly, I was aware that, if I had published this book without a short reflection on the confession of Chalcedon, so that many readers, believers, would have been confronted with only the development of the origins of New Testament faith;
[099] these believers might be disturbed in a manner that I considered unjustified. The fact that now even a couple not even particularly 'conservative' theologians – if it makes sense to express oneself in these terms – have fundamentally misunderstood the book, confirms that my fear of illegitimately disturbing others' faith was correct, even though I also accept that there are legitimately Christian ways of provoking a 'disturbance of people's faith'. Secondly, because there would be a chance that the significance of the accent

which I place on the theological importance of a historic genetic study of the apostolic faith would perhaps become even more suspicious for many without a reflection on the Council of Chalcedon. Thus I was aware that the consistent and gradual construction of the intended christological project was interrupted by this insertion. However, I am of the opinion that 'the mercifulness of faith' (see II, 595) must also be a mark of the theologian. One can criticize me for this, perhaps rightly, but I have gladly taken this odium upon myself for the sake of the task placed before a Christian theologian.

This does not mean that, with that anticipated and succinct insertion, I suddenly took a quite different course. As the basis of that provisional synthesis I took precisely one key element from the concept of the Mosaic-Messianic eschatological prophet, namely, Moses, the leader of the people, who 'speaks to God face to face', 'as a friend speaks with his friend' – expressed in the New Testament with regard to Jesus in his Abba experience. I pointed out that that Abba experience cannot be detached from Jesus' liberating praxis and only there finds its uniqueness. Jesus did not so much preach a new doctrine about God over against the Jewish Yahwistic tradition, but rather he had a particularly sharp prophetic eye for the actual social functioning of this concept of God in the Jewish society of that time, to the detriment of the little ones. He unmasked a concept of God which enslaves people and championed a God who liberates people. I said that his Abba experience is only unique within his liberating message and way of life. Jesus addresses God as Father on the basis of, and within the context of, his liberating acting. Whoever detaches Jesus' Abba experience from his healing, liberating and reconciling ministry misunderstands the historical reality of Jesus.

That I therefore would have suddenly forgotten the parousia christology of the eschatological prophet in the rather 'classical insertion' in the fourth section of my first Jesus book seems incorrect to me, even though I valorized only one [100] aspect in that synthetic insertion. According to the New Testament, the question is Jesus' unique relationship to the coming kingdom of God, as salvation by and for man, in which Jesus wants us to have a part. In the inserted synthesis (I, 626-69), I have brought this one basic datum from the previous analyses of my book in connection with the christological dogma of Chalcedon – nothing else. I know, therefore, that the potentialities and promises of my first three sections were not realized in this synthesis and, moreover, that this synthesis is not really in its place there. At that point the central result of my preceding study, namely the parousia christology of the eschatological prophet of the coming kingdom of God as mother of all Christianity[78] and therefore as both guiding and admonishing criterion for all

[78] With this I would like to correct J. B. Metz's new appeal to apocalyptics (especially in : *Glaube in*

'christology to the second power' (I, 545-50) has not yet been worked out systematically; see, hopefully, my third Jesus book.

Therefore it makes little sense to go into depth here about the objections which call attention to these lacunae, because I would then have to anticipate the third book too much. On the other hand, I cannot act as if this fourth section of my first Jesus book is not there. So I am just going into some critique which has to do with what is actually written in that section.

One frequently recurring objection is: in my exposition of the Passion (I, 612-625), in which I do speak at length about meaning and meaninglessness, justice and injustice, love and lovelessness in our human history, where is the mention of sin and guilt? Or what is the unique nature of the salvation which Jesus offers us? Fundamental questions indeed, fundamental too for a christology which wants to grow out of a soteriology. However, these questions are answered at length in my second Jesus book, in accordance with my project of a step-by-step elaboration from soteriology to christology. In the first Jesus book all this was provisionally comprised in the continually repeated keyword: 'salvation from God through the mediation of Jesus as the eschatological prophet of the coming kingdom of God'. But why presuppose *a priori* that I intend to reduce salvation to human well-being and emancipatory liberation, arguing away religious salvation? In any case, these doubters get sufficient documentation in my second Jesus book.

[101] One finds a more important objection, almost identically formulated by W. Kasper and W. Löser:[79] for me, partial experiences are no longer an implicit participation in the total meaning of reality, but an anticipation of a total meaning in the midst of a world which is still in a process of coming into being (I, 618). Precisely what both authors have against this, they do not say. It is just arbitrarily postulated that talking about anticipation instead of participation, in the way that I do it, is 'philosophically rather superficial'. However, let me explain positively what is at stake with this apparently only subtle distinction. First of all, I want to safeguard the openness of our becoming history and therefore the reality of ongoing history, after the Jesus event as well. In other words, the redemption accomplished in Jesus should be presented in such a way that our history indeed remains human history. As long as history is still in a process of developing, it still does not possess any totality in itself and its totality of meaning can only be given in anticipation, e.g. in Marxist, Christian or other anticipations of meaning (by the way, Kasper especially seems suddenly to have forgotten his use of 'anticipation of meaning' in many of his

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Geschichte und Gesellschaft, Mainz 1977, 149-158, and *Zeit der Orden? Zur Mystik und Politik der Nachfolge,* Freiburg 1977). Apocalyptics is not the 'mother of Christianity,' but the Christian interpretation of the coming of the kingdom of God is: parousia christology of the eschatological prophet.

[79] Löser, op. cit., 264; Kasper, op. cit., 358B.

other works). The basic foundation and above all the unique nature of the reality of these diverse anticipations is itself also divergent. For the Christian, it is that which has been achieved in Jesus the Christ. However, this can be and is explained in different ways as well. Who will deny that the idea of the 'objective redemption' – everything has already been accomplished in Jesus Christ – has often encapsulated the critical and prophetic power of Christianity? In that case the Christian's place would only be building the church where redemption is celebrated, while the world and its history of suffering and injustice are left to their own fate. Naturally, for the Christian, it turns out that, in spite of everything, the kingdom of God does come anyway, in and through Jesus, as salvation for mankind; what was accomplished in Jesus Christ guarantees this. For this reason, the promise of total meaning is not just a word of promise, but a living reality of the promise in the 'Firstborn' of many brothers. In that sense the idea of an 'objective redemption' has a clear meaning for a dogmatic theologian. Christian salvation cannot one-sidedly be postponed till the *eschaton*; in other words, ultimate salvation is no longer undecided;[80] about that, certainty of faith exists. However, how this is to be reconciled with the actual ongoing history of mankind's suffering and guilt [102] cannot, in my opinion, be further explained in theological or theoretical terms (I, 616-625).[81] For me, this impossibility of reconciling by theory and argument the salvation granted in Jesus with the real progress of history, which clearly shows the limits of human rationality, is the reason for not speaking of implicit participation in a previously given total meaning, but of an 'anticipation in orthopraxis', not only in spite of but even in suffering, thanks to what indeed is already accomplished in Jesus as the Christ and what, moreover, is celebrated in the liturgy (in addition see II, 802-839). With this I distance myself from perspectives in which the salvation in Christ is indeed completely postponed till the *eschaton*. By means of such unilateral eschatologizing, ideas of this kind, which are apparently on the increase, strip Jesus as the Christ of his definitive, decisive significance for our history. But I do not understand the grounds on which people could identify my first Jesus book with a 'Jesuology with a concern for orthopraxis' (W. Kasper's expression). I thought even the Christian Enlightenment in the eighteenth century found the myth of 'Rabbi Joshua' too thin for its bourgeois Christianity! Would we indeed, forgetting the lessons of history, have anything real to offer our world with a new, progressively clothed 'Rabbi Joshua'?

[80] See also J. B. Metz, *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft,* Mainz 1977, who rightly reacts against a 'conditional soteriology' (117).

[81] See also Metz, op. cit., 117-118, who also bases the necessity of a narrative and practical Christianity on this. Cf. B. Wacker, *Narrative Theologie?,* Munich 1977, and the important critical questions of D. Mieth, *Erfahrung und Moral,* Freiburg 1977.

(d) Absence of the church?

Only a few critics make reproachful comments about the absence of 'the church' in my two Jesus books.

I already mentioned above how the entire church tradition does in fact play a hermeneutical role in my Christian interpretation. In that first Jesus book I even say repeatedly: without historical mediation by the church we would not even have any significant knowledge about a certain Jesus of Nazareth (I, 17; also I, 34-35, etc.). I do admit that I have used the word 'church' in particular remarkably little, and quite intentionally; on the one hand, out of a Christian critical reaction to a certain ecclesiocentrism to the detriment of a Christocentrism directed towards the kingdom of God; on the other hand, because I hope to make pneumatology and ecclesiology, which are implicitly present in those first two Jesus books, the explicit object, among other things,
[103] of the third book of this trilogy about Jesus Christ (see II, 840), but then from a persistent view upon the kingdom of God and Jesus' messianic significance for the coming of this kingdom of the God concerned with human salvation.

It does indeed continue to be remarkable that e.g. the Second Vatican Council did present an extensive dogmatic constitution 'on the Church', *Lumen Gentium,* but was not able to give us any gratifying vision of what Jesus as the Christ can mean today for our search for God's concern for man. In other words, the ecclesiology was explicit here, whereas the christology remained rather implicit. Perhaps understandable historically, however this is not the healthiest situation theologically. The consequence of this is that it is more difficult to refute the cause of the reproach that, behind highly sacred words about the church, which are pronounced by her leaders themselves, the assertion of their own power position also lies concealed. However, many Christians would applaud a church which proclaims Jesus as the Christ more and itself less.

By means of the way in which these two Jesus books are written, I have indeed wanted to cooperate with this renewed concentration of the church on the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ's role in it, while on the other hand a Protestant colleague views it correctly when he writes concerning my second Jesus book: 'Perhaps it seems that the book stands apart from the church, because initially it wants to have a critical effect in the direction of the church as institution. But then the "no" is embedded in a deeper "yes".'[82] Ultimately no one writes a christology for eternity, but for the good of people living now,

[82] A. Geense, 'Het vijfde evangelie', in *De Tijd,* 16 December 1977, 47. For that reason I find J. B. Metz's judgment concerning the 'Idealistic' character (that is, an undialectical relationship between theory and praxis) of all contemporary christologies, among which he names those of K. Rahner, W. Kasper, H. Küng and also myself, somewhat premature (J. B. Metz, *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft,* Mainz 1977, 49, footnote 6).

hoping in this way to make the echo of the apostolic faith audible in his time.

This Jesus intensely appeals to many Christians, but they are looking for a model with which to identify. For without such a model the individual person cannot live, even as a Christian. Indeed, Christian personal identity and identity of the church are correlative; both need mutual confirmation. Where this is lacking and where only a partial identification is possible – be it of the faithful with the great church, be it of the great 'official church' with the faithful, be it of Christian churches among themselves – there the story of the Christian tradition of experience undergoes a moment of crisis.

But for anyone who knows something of the history and the 'anti-history', it is clear that no single era of Christianity has been spared such partial [104] identifications. Despite the seductiveness of a charged 'idealism of origins', through which the history of early Christianity does teach us to know better, one of the fundamental and stubbornly maintained hypotheses, especially of the Roman Catholic Church, is that she is also a church of sinners from top to bottom. And in addition, that one of Jesus' holy fundamental intentions was: opposition to the idea of one, exclusivist, 'holy remnant community' – the Qumran idea, which persistently seems to be a concomitant phenomenon of all periods of Christianity. Salvation from God in Jesus, experienced and accepted by men who, from this same inspiration and experience of salvation, genuinely form community – church – is also lived out by this community and her leaders in the same predicament. And this 'human shortcoming' is no alibi for guilt and infidelity, but makes up the genuine Christian challenge, presented to us by Jesus himself, not to relinquish our vigilance, but never to become more grim ourselves than the God of us all: he loved us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5.8). But with this I am already anticipating the ecclesiological section which I hope will appear in my third Jesus book.

Chapter 6

KINGDOM OF GOD: CREATION AND SALVATION

Some think that in Part Four of my second Jesus book I spoke mainly about social and political liberation and too little about mystical liberation of the human person. This seems to me to be a criticism which measures the weight of an issue by the number of pages devoted to it. Due to its complexity, a specific subject can require a more lengthy explanation, but as such this need not say anything about its relative importance. In fact I deny the proposed dilemma: political liberation or mystical liberation. That fourth section's approach is man's wholeness, and this making man whole includes social and political as well as mystical dimensions; the two cannot be contrasted with each other. Restructuring and inner conversion form a dialectical process. Moreover, it is a fact that one can localize centuries or periods 'of mysticism' in social and economical terms as well.

In the Christian gospel, the 'symbol' God and the 'symbol' Jesus acquire an inherent critical and productive power: a religion which – in any way – really has the effect of dehumanizing people – in whatever way –, is either a false religion or a religion which understands itself incorrectly. Mysticism which is indifferent to unjust conditions and seeks to transcend these in their entirety by mysticism alone, bears witness to a halved conception of humanity. By contrast, a liberation pathos without mysticism is also only a part of humanity, but when all mysticism is deliberately excluded this pathos becomes just as humanly alienating. This criterion of 'humanizing' is not a reduction of true Christianity; in modern times it is in fact the first prerequisite of the human possibility and credibility of the Christian faith. In the entire Bible, the coming [106] of the kingdom of God is the coming of God as salvation by and for human beings. Jesus Christ is the great symbol of this and no other God: 'image of the invisible God' (Col. 1.15). This gospel vision requires of Christians an unconditional concern for every man, above all for man in a pinch, personally or structurally. This demands of them an effort and commitment which has an eye for better structures as well as for the particular human person and his real

needs, which are in no sense the same as what a bourgeois advertisement would have one believe. The biblical concept of the 'kingdom of God' can tell us a great deal about this.

(a) Creation as an act of God's trust in man

The Deuteronomic as well as the Yahwistic vision of Israel's kingship, which was introduced in the tenth century BC under Samuel and Saul, is important for understanding the Jewish-Christian concept of the rule and the kingdom of God, even though this concept will later acquire all kinds of new nuances, especially in apocalyptic, which also influenced the New Testament.

About a half-century after the introduction of the kingship in Israel, when Deuteronomic theology reflects on these older events in its great historical survey, things have already gone completely wrong with this kingship. In any case, the Deuteronomic view is that only Yahweh 'rules in Israel', and that where God rules, all dominion by man over man ceases to exist (see also in the New Testament: Matt. 20.25-26; Mark 10.42-43; Luke 22.25). When I Samuel 8.11-18 describes human rule, we only hear of exploitation, taxes, military service, appropriation of possessions, and slavery. That is why the people that wants a king like the other nations is emphatically told: 'And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day' (I Sam. 8.18). The introduction of the kingship can only mean slavery and exploitation precisely because only Yahweh is Israel's king (I Sam. 12.12). Then Israel falls into decay just like other nations of the world. But the kingdom did in fact come. Deuteronomic theology could not argue this fact away, and solved the problem with a compromise: 'If you will fear the Lord and serve him and heed his voice and
[107] not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well' (I Sam. 12.14)! In that case, finally, only God remains ruling; then there is salvation and peace for the people in Israel. For this theology, God's rule is liberation of man. Even more, the historical fact of Yahweh's 'leading Israel out of Egypt' is, in the legal terminology of the time, the legal basis of Yahweh's being Lord over Israel. Precisely for that reason Israel must 'follow' its Liberator, that is, serve only Yahweh and tolerate no other bonds: to have an obligation to serve Yahweh is being liberated from all other subjection. One serves only one Lord. Thus the kingdom of God is indeed a rule, but as God's rule; it is at the same time the abolition of every foreign rule for Israel, of man over man and of self-imposed bonds. Letting go of everything 'for the sake of the kingdom of God': this is the only liberating rule, because it means the prevalence of righteousness and love, a rule which establishes the insignificant (Deut. 7.6-9).

Later, for Paul as well, the liberation of Christians from the Law will nonetheless mean an *'en-nomos'*, a coming under the Law of Christ (I Cor. 9.21), which is a law of love and no unrestrained arbitrariness. We have to abandon our modern, understandable distaste for all that the word 'rule' evokes, not because of God's omnipotence – a term which was misused just as much –, but in the face of God's saving omnipotence which shows itself in solidarity with human helplessness and seeks to help the oppressed. This is what the kingdom of God means.

Yahwistic theology was not blind either to the failing of Israel's kings and already, long before Deuteronomic theology, it had developed a very different, royal theology. For this tradition, the tenth-century occurrence of the installation of Israel's royal house with all its syncretism is the completely new and as it were secularizing event of that century, which in a specific way breaks with Israel's sacred past (see II, 172, n. 67 [Collected Works n. 23] and II, 173, n. 69 [Collected Works n. 25). As Jesus would also do later, David could transgress the sacred ritual prescriptions. Being hungry, he removes the sacred showbread (I Sam. 21.1-6; see Mark 2.23-28); he transgresses the purity laws in connection with the death of his own son (II Sam. 12.16-23), and as Jesus permits the abundant use of nard at the anointing in Bethany, the thirsty David pours out the precious Bethlehem water on the ground, 'senselessly', in [108] solidarity with his troops, while it nonetheless had been fetched from occupied Bethlehem by one of his valiant warriors at the risk of his life (II Sam. 23.13-17; see 5.13-25; cf. John 12.1-8). This wise man, king and son of man, does all this because he knows that God places unconditional trust in him, the king; the free David also holds Yahweh to his word (II Sam. 7.25). The Yahweh-faithful king is the free viceroy of God who – in imitation of God's creation as the ordering of chaotic primal forces – will now himself be obliged to recreate real human history, from chaos to order or *shalom*, according to his own wise insights. David, 'the little man', taken 'from following the sheep' (II Sam. 7.18b; 7.8c), 'exalted out of the dust' (I Kings 16.1-3; see I Sam. 2.6-8; Ps. 113.7; Gen. 2.7), and himself not worthy of being trusted, is raised from the dust and trusted unconditionally by God (II Sam. 7.8-12): from dust or nothingness, exalted to be king (apparently an old stereotyped inauguration formula at someone's installation as king). On the basis of this divine trust, he, David, will have to take care of things himself in accordance with his own wisdom; freely and responsibly, he will have to make history for the benefit of his people. The welfare of this people depends on the wisdom of the king, the source of all life.

The Yahwist knows that David fails in this assignment. Even though God will correct and chastize him (II Sam. 7.14), he 'will not take [his] *hesed*' (favour) from David (II Sam. 7.15). God's trust in the king is never revoked.

Now the characteristic of this Yahwistic tradition lies in this: it tries to

understand human history, beginning with Adam, on the basis of the experiences with the Davidic royal house. What happens there is typical for being human, common to all of us. What happens with David is the key which unlocks the understanding of the human condition common to all of us. In the Yahwist, 'the Adam' of the second creation story is 'the royal person' or 'son of man', i.e., each person, but conceived according to the model of king David: from dust or nothingness, appointed by God as his vassal king or vizier on earth (see Gen. 2.7). The creator puts his fullest trust in this man of nothing, 'raised from the dust' like David. As God's representative man is entrusted with the Garden. He must in all conscience, responsible and free, work out for
[109] himself what there is for him to do in the garden, albeit within limits set by God ('not to eat of that one tree'; old myths are reworked within this royal theology). Man himself is responsible for earthly history and will have to make order and *shalom* out of chaos, like king David. The world and history are entrusted to him within creaturely limits, and in that context Yahweh bestows on man his complete confidence.

But like David, man also fails, every Adam, every son of man. God punishes him, although always less than he deserves, but he does not revoke his trust in man. In spite of everything, God does not despair of man, this is the Yahwistic creation message – not 'a doctrine' that came from somewhere, but a precise historical experience: an interpreted experience within the 'Davidic model'. God entrusts man with the recreation of the chaos of our history into *shalom* and order, salvation by and for mankind. For this purpose, by God's sovereign royal decree, God's creation blessing has been given to man. God's fidelity is greater than all human failure. His kingdom is coming and will one day be inaugurated. He, God, continues to trust mankind.

(b) God's trust in man will ultimately not beput to shame

For the New Testament, the man Jesus – the son of man, the son of David, the second Adam – is the ultimate key to understanding the existence of human life, in whom Israel's ancient dream takes definite form: both the final commitment of God's unconditional trust in mankind and the perfect human response to this divine trust. In Jesus, both God's trust in man and man's response of trust in God, take on their definitive historical form. Jesus is alpha and omega. That is the message of the New Testament.

During his life, the disciples had asked Jesus, 'Lord, what will we be like, when that final kingdom dawns?' But in the meantime, in the later New Testament churches, the situation was very different. Then that question became: 'Lord, how shall we, as Christians, live in the midst of this world?' Recalling Jesus' inspiration and manifold guidelines, the Gospel of Matthew

above all responds to this question in his Sermon on the Mount. And that Sermon on the Mount is in the context of the beatitudes on the poor, mourning and oppressed (Matt. 5.3-12), the context of the great, Old Testament, 'Isaian [110] prophecy', which Jesus had made his own: 'The Lord has anointed me... to bring good news to the oppressed,... to proclaim liberty to the captives...; to comfort all who mourn; ...to give... the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit' (Isa. 61.1-3; see I, 172-178). A message for the poor, mourning and oppressed: that is the core of the Sermon on the Mount and the fundamental rule for being a Christian in this world. What does the content of this message to the poor sound like? 'The news of your salvation, in particular, "Your God reigns"' (Isa. 52.7), i.e., righteousness and love are now beginning to dwell among men; 'I am the Lord, I have called you ... as... a light to the nations' (Isa. 42.6). All kinds of Old Testament traditions come together here.

Jesus so identified himself with this message that, for the New Testament, this gospel of Jesus is inseparable from his person. *Eu-angelion,* gospel, is not only 'Jesus of Nazareth', but essentially also the confession of Jesus as the one who is to come: 'The Christ, his only Son, our Lord'. There is no gospel without Jesus, but also no gospel without the Christ who is to come. This is the basic datum of the New Testament. Nonetheless in such a way that the entire Christ content is intrinsically determined by what and who Jesus of Nazareth is, has said and done and, as a consequence of his message and active life, has suffered. For the New Testament, gospel is good news, for it is salvation from God manifested in and through Jesus Christ: the coming of God's kingdom.

Via a long history, Jesus' message and person is linked to the great Jewish expectation of salvation in the approaching kingdom of God, also linked to Israel's royal messianic expectations as a model of general human expectations and finally linked to creation as the starting point of this coming event in which God entrusts to man his struggle against the chaotic powers. In this struggle, man is God's own viceroy on earth. In spite of everything, and without any basis in man's self, that is as a free gift and unconditionally, God entrusts it to mankind. 'Man' or 'the Son of Man' – first the king, after that every human being – is ultimately 'Jesus of Nazareth' (see this movement from 'man' to 'Jesus Christ' in Heb. 2.8-9 also). In him God's risky trust in man is not disappointed. In spite of everything – even in spite of the execution of the [111] eschatological prophet of God's approaching kingdom of salvation by and for man – this kingdom is still coming: resurrection! The creation promise is repeatedly contradicted by the actual course of history, but it is brought to completion. Israel's old dream of the coming kingdom as *shalom* for man, placed in the hands of men, is in that case also the horizon of expectation and experience in which Jesus must be seen and interpreted: the man in whom the creation assignment has been successful, albeit still within the conditions of a

history of suffering. The consequence of this is that trust in this man is the specific form of faith in God, creator of heaven and earth, who through his creative action places unconditional trust in mankind. Without this divine trust in man, creation would indeed make no sense! This man Jesus makes it possible for us to believe that God indeed places his unconditional trust in mankind – while for many precisely what happens in our history of suffering is the reason why they no longer can believe in God. After Auschwitz and the like, belief that God trusts men is severely tested. And nonetheless! says the Jewish-Christian tradition of experience.

This expresses that faith in God is impossible without faith in man. Christianity expresses this in its creed: 'I believe in God, the creator of heaven and earth, *and* in Jesus: the Christ, his only Son, our Lord.' This faith in God's trust in man as well as in *this* man Jesus is so paradoxical that it is only possible in the power of the Spirit of God: 'I believe in the Holy Spirit.' The paradox of this lies in our faith that God trusts man, while we hardly have any reasons to trust 'human beings', others and ourselves. Repeating many Old Testament echoes, Paul expresses it like this: 'God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us' (Rom. 5.8).

This makes the New Testament message universal, for by means of this it is anchored in the universal happening of creation: faith in God, creator of heaven and earth, who therefore will judge all, the 'living and the dead', – everyone. Creation and salvation, therefore, shed light on each another, mutually and essentially. Any other, alienating vision of creation, as an act of God's trust in man, will therefore distort the Christian vision of Jesus, or even
[112] make it impossible. For creation faith is only liberating – this only becomes fully apparent from Jesus' trust in his creator, the Father – if we understand creation neither dualistically nor as an emanation.

(c) Creation: God lingering lovingly with the finite – the lowly

In this context, dualism came into being from man's scandal at suffering and evil, injustice and meaninglessness in our world, nature and history. Therefore it denies that God, when creating, willed the world precisely as world, and men and women precisely as human beings. In that case, finitude is not the normal condition of creatures, but is traced back to a fault in creation or to a mysterious primal sin. In the light of creation interpreted in this way, salvation or being whole, i.e. the true, integral form of our being human, is then also placed either in a past and lost paradise or in an apocalyptic new earth and new humanity which is coming. God will bring about this new state of affairs only secondarily, and on top of the terrible mess of this world, in an unexpected and sudden future which, given the terrible mess in which we live,

is imminent. In this vision, the world of creation is a sort of compromise between God and one or another dark power.

Emanationism, for its part, is not so very different in essence from dualism, but it does come from a very different sentiment towards life, namely from the concern to safeguard God's transcendence. God is so great and so exalted that it is beneath his dignity to meddle directly with creatures and to compromise himself. He entrusts creation to a representative, a principal viceroy of a somewhat lower order. From this perspective, world and men are degradations of God – divinity reduced in rank, because this flowing forth of things from God is seen above all as a necessary process.

In both cases – dualistic and emanationist conceptions of creation – man's salvation or well-being logically consists in raising himself above his human and worldly conditions and his own specific human character in order thus to reach a super-creaturely status. This distorts the entire good news of creation. The Old Testament story in Genesis sees the so-called primal human sin not in the fact that people want to be just a people in a world which is just a world, but rather in the fact that man does not want to accept his finite or contingent [113] condition, that he craves infinity: immortality and omniscience, in order to become like God.

In deliberate contrast to such ideas about creation, the Jewish-Christian belief in creation says, after a long history of maturing, that God is God, the sun is the sun, the moon is the moon and man is man, and moreover that God's blessing rests precisely upon this: it is good like this. It is good that man is just man, the world just the world, i.e. not-God, contingent: they could just as well not have been there and nonetheless they are said to be worth the difficulty and the cost. They are there without any explanation or foundation in themselves or in anything else in this world, nature or history. Precisely for this reason, belief in the creating God cannot be an explanation either, for from his side God's act of creation is unconditional and absolutely free. In that case, finitude means that the creature has no prior necessity at all and does not find any explanation in any connection with this world: it is there, inexplicabe, as pure gift. Nowhere – not even in God – is it prescribed how man, society and the world should turn out. How the world, which is there, will turn out, is something man himself will have to discover in good conscience; he will have to devise it and implement it within the limits of the material universe in quite precarious situations – in the condition of a creature.

The basic fault of many misconceptions regarding creation lies in this: that one senses finitude as a wounding, which as such really need not and should not adhere to the things of the world. Therefore one begins to seek a separate cause of this finitude and finds this in some dark power of evil or in some kind of original sin. In other words, finitude is identified with the improper, with a

disorder, even with sinfulness or apostasy, a wound in the existence of man and the world. As if coming and going, mortality, failing, mistakes and ignorance need not belong to the normal condition of our being human and as if people would originally be equipped with all kinds of 'preternatural' gifts such as omniscience and immortality, things which man would have lost due to the primal Fall. Close reading shows that the Genesis story, albeit in mythical terms, wants to register a protest against precisely such representations. If God is creator, then he does indeed create the non-divine, that which is wholly other than himself, in other words, finite things. Creatures
[114] are not copies of God. The Jewish-Christian belief in creation has quite keenly grasped this, even though one must admit that, under foreign influence, much distortion has often been introduced into the representations of creation, by many Christians as well. I would like to elucidate the unique characteristics of this Christian belief in creation, in two respects.

a. First of all, this belief implies that we in no way have to transcend or escape our contingency or finitude, or to experience it as a wound. We may and must just be people in an environment which is just the world: fascinating, but also mortal, failing, suffering. To want to transcend the finitude is megalomania, which alienates man from himself, the world and nature. Being human and the world are no fall, no apostasy from God, no fiasco and thus in principle neither a test in expectation of better times. If God is Creator, then the creature is indeed not-God, other than God; then it may be different, and this also includes the burden of subjection and ignorance, of suffering and mortality, of coming and going, of failing and mistakes. Finitude or contingency means that man and the world, in and of themselves, hang in a vacuum, above absolute nothingness. There is nothing between the world and God that can be added for the interpretation of their relationship. This is what one means when one uses symbolic language to speak of 'creation from nothing'.

b. But the reverse side of this belief in creation is that the anguish of this dangling above absolute nothingness at the same time has as a counter-balance the absolute presence of God in and with the finite. Finite beings are a mixture of solitude and presence, and therefore faith in the creating God does not take away the finitude, nor distort it as sinfulness or decay, but makes it take up this finitude in God's presence, without divesting the world and man of their finitude or regarding these as hostile. In this respect Christian belief in creation distinguishes itself from pantheistic conceptions as well; for if God's presence were to mean that everything else outside God were to be explained in some way as an illusion or as belonging to the proper definition of God, then God does not seem to be able to be present with sufficient power to be able to bring autonomous and nonetheless non-divine beings into existence. From a

Christian point of view, the world and human beings are utterly different from God, but within the presence of the creating God. Therefore this other-than-God can never emigrate from the divine act of creation; in other words, God [115] remains beside and with the contingent, the other-than-God – the world in its worldliness and man in his autonomous but finite humanity.

It follows from this twofold character that (in contrast to the vision of dualism and emanationism), salvation from God never consists in God's saving us *from* our finitude and *from* all that this involves. For a creating God, this is precisely where God's own powerlessness lies. In that case he also wills this powerlessness, absolutely freely. However, this also means that he wants to be our God in our humanity and for our humanity, in and with our finitude. It means therefore that we may be men in humanity, albeit also in mortality and suffering. But this, in itself very oppressive, burden at the same time means that God is beside us and with us, also in our failing, also in our suffering, also in our death, just as much as in and with all our positive experiences and sensations. It also means that he is present to the sinner, forgiving. Indeed, the boundary between God and us is our boundary, not God's. This has considerable consequences. In acknowledging and accepting our limits and those of nature and history, we acknowledge the divinity of God; and to acknowledge the finite condition of man and the world is to acknowledge what gives man and the world their own specific character, and at the same time to acknowledge that they are not divine and are therefore limited, and to act in accordance with this.

Because it is only possible to talk of God, that is to speak of God as creator in the indirectness of worldly intermediaries, namely our contingent nature and history, this means that these conditions are experienced as non-divine; they may not be absolutized or idolized. Here, *inter alia,* lies the critical power of belief in creation, which for that reason at the same time signifies salvation by and for man and the world, and their judgment. To want to annul this boundary from our side towards God is what the Bible calls the fundamental human sin, continually repeating itself in the course of history. On the other hand, this belief in creation sets us free for our own task in the world. Enjoying and loving what is worldly in the world, what is human in man, is enjoying and loving what is divine in God. God's honour lies in the happiness, in the well-being of man in the world, who seeks his honour in God: this seems to me [116] to be the best definition of what creation means. Then this creation is no one-time event somewhere in the beginning, but a sustained dynamic event. God wants to be the origin, here and now, of the worldliness of the world and of the humanity of man. He wants to be with us, in and with our finite task in the world.

Belief in the creating God is never an explanation; neither does it want to be

according to its own understanding of itself. This faith is good news which says something about God, the human person and the world, and indeed in their mutual relationship. It is a message which the human person does not hear about primarily from some authoritative body foreign to his own experience. On the contrary, it is an invitation, an echo which he can listen to from his own familiar world of experience: from nature and history. Nature and history are authoritative sources in and through which God reveals himself as creator in and through our fundamental experiences of finitude.

If the Jewish-Christian belief in creation does not want to be an explanation of our world and our humanity, then this faith will make us pose quite different questions than when we would incorrectly understand creation as explanation. If God would be the explanation of why things and events are what they are, then every attempt to change these is indeed blasphemous. Then there exists only the obligation to adapt oneself to the predetermined and preconceived universe. Then God becomes the guarantor of the established order – not 'salvator', as the Christians began to call him, but 'conservator', as the Roman-Hellenistic religions had called him. The consequence of this misconception is that, if something went wrong, the only meaningful transformation of world and society would be a restoration or reconstruction of things to their ideal order. Structurally, it makes little difference whether one places this ideal order at the beginning of time, the earthly paradise, or in a distant future, or at the end of time, a golden age to come. In both cases the concept of creation is falsified to a misplaced explanation instead of being good news for people anguished by their finitude or by dangling above absolute nothingness. As a schema used for explanation, it makes little difference whether one sees history as a falling away from an original ideal situation or as a progressive evolutionary development towards an ideal situation: in both
[117] cases one fails to appreciate contingency as the hallmark of man and the world. Then one reduces historicity either to a genetic development from a prefabricated plan or to a chronological, logically developing progressivity or advancement. With this, the most essential aspect of all historicity is neglected, namely finitude: everything could just as well not have been, and it could have been other than it in fact is.

This applies to everything which shows up in this world, in nature and in history. Also institutions, specific historical figures such as languages, cultures and civilizations, even the forms of religions, are mortal; they come and go; and then we need not be surprised that a day comes when they go. Nothing of all of this is non-contingent. This means that matter, too, as the combined action of coincidence and necessity, is an actual result that need not have been, or which could have been otherwise. The finitude of every process of becoming is annulled by a concept of creation which understands itself as an explanation

of the phenomena in nature and history. On the human level, this also applies to man. If we are created, and this means: if we are created in the image and likeness of God, then man has to be something other than a conservator, a restorer and discoverer of what is already there anyway. Then, rather, man himself becomes the point of departure of what he will do, and of everything he will make of the world and society – and what could have not been and nonetheless is in fact, thanks to man's finite free will. God creates people as the point of departure of their own human activity, which itself therefore will have to design the world and its future and implement this within contingent situations. For God can never be the absolute origin of man's humanity, in other words, no creator, if he were to make man only a subcontractor of a predetermined divine blueprint. On the contrary, he creates man as a free designer of his own human future, to be realized in contingent situations, partly thanks to the finite human free will which can choose between various alternatives as well as between good and evil – a distinction which does not precede that freedom, but which constitutes man and his free choice. Otherwise, the worldliness of the world and the humanity of man are once again subtly annulled.

As late as at the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a papal verdict against the practice of smallpox vaccinations, since at that time smallpox was explained as punishment from God, once again within a misplaced explanatory notion of creation. Even now, while the birth of a [118] deformed baby is no longer seen as punishment from God, nonetheless it is often interpreted as divine pedagogy, which just as much betrays an explanatory notion of creation. Such blasphemous explanations would not have been necessary if one had thought more deeply about the Christian belief in creation and thus about the unpredictable possibilities for contingency, for which neither God nor creatures are responsible, while these events leave neither God nor human beings indifferent, and challenge them both to take a position.

The transformation of the world, the designing of a better society for men to live in, and a new earth, lie in the hands of man himself; therefore he cannot expect God to solve his problems for him. Based on a correct belief in creation, we cannot pass off our task in this world on to God, considering the inexorable boundary (on our side) between the infinite and the finite, as a result of which God is in his sphere and man is in this world. Our assignment and our burden within all finitude is to overcome suffering and evil everywhere we encounter it, with all possible means of science and technology, of help from our fellow men and, if necessary, perhaps through revolution if it cannot be otherwise: it is no business of God's, except that our task lies within the absolute presence of God and is therefore a human concern which is also close to God's heart. The

fact that the world looks like it looks is, along with all the unforeseen coincidences and causal braids, partly to be understood from the perspective of the historical and social free will of mankind itself in its dialectical relationship with nature.

This also implies that the possibility of a transcendent negation is given in principle, as an element of anticipation or future design of man himself. Belief in creation gives us no information about the inner constitution of man, the world and society: the task of philosophy and the sciences is to search for these. However, faith does point to the contingency of all their forms and to the proper nature by which the world is given to human beings as a possibility for what they themselves will make of it in conscience, within all the contingencies. The world is a possibility of human rational design to be realized in freedom, even if the future is never fully the product of human planning and implementation, and consequently, even if the contingent human
[119] life demands a big dose of acceptance and, in this sense, of resignation as well. For the sake of human freedom, a certain skepticism towards the history of human freedom is also appropriate. After all, the future can never be interpreted purely teleologically, according to a cause-and-effect diagram, never purely technologically or according to the logic of development. The future is also contingent, and therefore never falls completely under the firm grip of equally finite human beings in a contingent world. With belief in creation as a foundation, then, only God is the Lord of history. He has begun this adventure and so it is also his supreme concern; but that is his terrain, not ours.

(d) The proviso of the creator God

Therefore, religious belief in creation has its own critical and productive power with regard to these pessimistic and optimistic, ultimately unrealistic perspectives of history and society. Even changes for the good do not necessarily happen according to developmental logic, just as changes pure and simple do not have to be reduced to human decline and perversity either. The restorative tendency as well as the tendency towards a progressive promotion are, in their effect, unhistorical – ultimately also a rejection of the contingency and mortality of social, political and economic and even ecclesiastical forms of history. From a theological point of view, the proviso of the creating God continues to apply here, often reduced unjustly to an eschatological proviso. On our side of the boundary this means: accepting the finitude of man, the world and history. Finitude is, therefore, not at all additionally accentuated by this belief in God's proviso: this proviso and the finitude of man and the world are two sides of the same coin. Rather than being a kind of step backwards

(which would more likely betray dualism or emanationism), this proviso means, on the contrary, that the possible desperation which the finitude of our existence can evoke, is taken up by God's absolute presence in his finite world of creation; and this presence stimulates precisely to continually renewed hope. He, the creator, is after all the creator of this entire 'saeculum', so that there are no eras, no centuries and not even any hours in which he leaves no witness to himself.

This then also means that the beginning of the history of human freedom coincides with the beginning of creation. Seen in this light, the [120] 'substantification' of the future, by means of which the pre-critical and pre-modern past is judged as an irrational prehistory, is philosophically and theologically difficult to place. In this matter as well the Christian belief in creation has a critical function. This has to do with the unique character of the Christian concept of God. In many religions the dualistic inclination, seemingly innate to man, is resolved by allowing good and evil to find their first principle equally in the one God; their God then is a God who gives life as well as death equally and with just as much right. Even Job had already rebelled against this. According to the Christian concept of God, however, God is 'not a God of the dead but of the living' (Matt. 22.32). In other words, this concept of God ascribes only pure positiveness to God, that is, in essence God is a promoter of the good and an opponent of all evil, injustice and suffering. This is presented mythologically in the creation psalms, in which the creating God engages in the struggle against the demonic beast of evil, Leviathan! Seen in this light, for one who believes in God the inspiration and orientation of all action can only lay in a call to promote all good and justice and to fight against all evil, injustice and suffering in all their forms. For God must always be thought of in such a way that he is never *just* thought of; speaking about God is subordinate to the primacy of praxis. It is subordinate to the question: 'Where are we going?' Well, I said that, within all finitude, this is a matter for mankind: ultimately, which way of being human do we choose? In addition, how far man takes account of his creaturely status in this regard is also to be considered, i.e. not only the creaturely status of his humanity but – because of this and within this, as he is bound to nature – also of the creaturely status and therefore the limits of nature. In the meantime, we have learned from irresponsible behaviour how the finitude of this nature shows itself. We have become more conscious of the limits of existing resources and energy consumption; of the limits of exploiting nature and of the limits of our environment; as a consequence of all this, we also became acquainted with the limits of economic expansion; we have learned the hard way that development is not unlimited.

Actually, we have thus realized that, albeit in the conditions of the modern

[121] world, we were busy doing what dualism and emanationism did in the past: looking for salvation in life above our creaturely status, through which, thrown into the bargain, we are egoistically robbing coming generations of their possible future. All this summons us to what I would call: the urgency of a collective ascesis based on our status as creature; we may be just human in an environment which is just the world.

(e) The inexhaustible surplus of creation

The fact that what, in the past, was only a matter for religions and Christianity, seems to be experienced today as a common task of all men, in no way weakens the Christian faith vision; quite the contrary. Since when does a particular vision of reality become less true because it ultimately becomes universalized, i.e., begins to be shared by a great many others as well? This argues, rather, for its accuracy. But one could reason in this way: admitting that the introduction of many ideas about values, especially in the West, is partly due to the Christian tradition of experience, these have now become the common property of all and, for this reason, we can now say farewell to this Christian faith, while thanking Christianity for services rendered – a saying that does receive attention, right and left. I believe that we then think to little about the inexhaustible potential of the Christian belief in creation for expectation and inspiration. The so-called tendency towards secularization, understood as a gradual universalizing of originally religious inspirations, which I regard as correct, seems to me however, as a totality thesis, to be a disastrous short-circuit, and this for two fundamental reasons. The first reason is finitude itself. Finitude, which is really the definition of all secularity, can indeed itself never be fully secularized, for in that case the modern world would nonetheless have to find a magic potion to nullify the essential finitude of man and the world. The second reason has to do with how religions understand themselves, especially Christianity. Humaneness, the orientation of 'worldly' experience, is, at least in the Christian tradition of experience, not intended only as ethical but rather as theologal or God-centered orientation (*virtus theologica, s*ays the tradition). Therefore the Christian tradition sees a religious depth-dimension in humaneness which has to do precisely with the
[122] insight of faith that finitude is not left in its solitude but is borne by the absolute presence of the creating God. And this presence continues to be an inexhaustible wellspring which can never be secularized.

I believe that precisely the critical and productive power of authentic belief in creation is that whatever element concerning value, inspiration and orientation that proceeds from it and that can unceasingly be universalized, and in this sense secularized, that is liberated for the benefit of all men, and so,

as it were, 'escapes' the monopoly of the particularity of religions and Christianity, can never catch up with the inexhaustible potential for expectation and inspiration which belief in creation possesses. For secularity says finitude. And although non-religious secularity sees only finitude in this, religious and Christian secularity sees, together with this finitude, God's presence, inexhaustible because it is absolute. On this basis, finitude or secularity will continue to point to the wellspring and basis, inspiration and orientation which surpasses all secularity, which believers call the Living God and which is not susceptible to any secularizing. Precisely for this reason, belief in creation is also the foundation of prayer and mysticism. There is a surplus in creation which cannot be derived from any secularity. That is also why the fullness of salvation cannot be reduced to what people do with it. The salvation of man is God himself, as man's wholeness. This implies that the experience of God – call it 'mysticism', without thereby intending extraordinary things – is the core of all human salvation – mysticism, however, which with and from the experience of God in the heart, goes out to man. Thus, according to the testimony of a mystic such as Eckhart, the model of all mysticism is not Mary, preoccupied with mysticism, but Martha, industriously caring for her fellow men. Thus mysticism is indeed the source of continuing improvement of human life and of society, the source of salvation of and for mankind.

(f) Eschatological surplus

Even though Christian salvation also includes earthly salvation, this salvation from God in Jesus is indeed indefinable in the upward direction; earthly salvation gradually slips into a greater mystery. We cannot pin down God's possibilities to our limited expectations of salvation. Whatever positively fills in definitive salvation runs the risk of becoming human megalomania or of belittling God's possibilities and, by means of this, also of restraining man, [123] keeping him smaller than God dreamed him (II, 840-851).

Because this definitive salvation, that is, the perfect and universal wholeness of all and every person, living and dead, cannot be defined, no one within the narrow limits of our history can complete the end of this story of God in Jesus with man, nor recount it to the end. After all, in the best case, each one's death time and again breaks the thread of a liberating narrative. Is there, then, no more salvation, not even for the one who has passed on the torch of this story and kept it burning among the living, and perhaps has been martyred for this reason? That is why the final consummation of God's way of salvation with man must be 'not of this world', while the liberating involvement of God with man, whom he rescues and makes whole, nonetheless may and must receive a

recognizable content in forms which in our history will nevertheless constantly be transcended..

Although definitive salvation is eschatological and obviously, as such, cannot be experienced as already present content of experience, the faith-inspired knowledge of the promise of a definitive perspective of salvation is nonetheless actually given in an experience-now, namely in fragments of particular experiences of salvation, thanks to Jesus Christ. The church's proclaimed 'notification and promise' of definitive salvation proceeding from the story of and about Jesus as the Christ takes on real meaning for believers only if it is based on such partial experiences of salvation. Without this religious story about Jesus Christ, we are at most confronted with a liberating utopia which perhaps arouses some chances of life and salvation for people who appear on the far horizon of our history, but which has just written off the rest of mankind of this 'prehistory' for the benefit of a dreamed-of utopia to be realized someday. Definitive salvation does indeed substantially exceed our present experience – ultimately no one among us experiences being whole now – but in so far as that promise-filled proclamation of salvation can and may be said to be valid, it does have its basis in a connection of experiences here and now; of Jesus and of those who 'follow after him' in this world, as well as of all those who actually do what Jesus did. This eschatological promise cannot rest
[124] purely on a verbal revelation – by the way, anthropologically, 'word' is an expression of human experience and praxis – thus, not on a purely proclaimed notification of a coming, definitive and complete salvation. For on what basis would such a 'notification' have real value? As God's exegete and a practitioner of one who acts in accordance with God's kingdom, neither did Jesus work from a blue-print or a well-defined concept of eschatological and definitive salvation. Rather, in and through his own historical and thus situationally limited praxis of 'going about doing good': of healing, liberating from reigning demonic powers of the world, and of reconciliation, throwing light on a distant vision of definitive, perfect and universal salvation: 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away' (Rev. 21.3-4); this is how the Christian Apocalypse interpreted, correctly, the vision of Jesus' ministry: the kingdom of God in its final form, which Jesus Christ already positively guarantees now.

Chapter 7

I BELIEVE IN JESUS OF NAZARETH

Belief in God is impossible without belief in humanity. This experience, which has come to maturity over the centuries, is expressed by Christians in their creed, which, old though it is, always remains new. 'I believe in God, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus, the Christ, his only Son, our Lord.' This twofold belief, on the one hand in the unconditional love of the creator for everything that he has called into being, and on the other hand in this man Jesus of Nazareth, is so paradoxical that it is possible only in the power of God's Spirit, which also dwelt in Jesus to the full: 'I believe in the Holy Spirit.' Within the community of the church we believe in God.

Within this tripartite structure of what has been called the Apostles' Creed since ancient times, I want to bring some clarity to the second element, belief in Jesus Christ. Of the many names or titles used in the New Testament, only three have found their way into the creed: 'Christ, God's only Son, our Lord'. In their own day, believers who had come under the spell of Jesus tried to use these titles, which were derived from their own originally Jewish experiential history, in order to put into words what the Jewish man called Jesus had come to mean to them, not just 'subjectively', as we might put it, but 'objectively', as a gift of God. The primary element in this creed is not the particular formulae which it uses, although these are in no way unimportant. It is essentially concerned with the groping attempts of Christians, that is, of believers and their leaders, to bear witness to their specific experience of salvation in Jesus, indeed from God, and to express it in a comprehensible way. Their experience of salvation comes first. Only afterwards did there come a progressive reflection on the content of the inner riches of this experience of belief, seen in the light of new experiences, new problems and new questions. The original experience out of which this creed was born is that Jesus of Nazareth, the [126] prophet of the eschatological kingdom, *is* Christ, i.e. salvation from God for men and women: Jesus is anointed by God's spirit ('Christus') to save his people (Isa. 61.1; 52.7).

(a) Christology: concentrated creation

After a number of Christian generations, the ancient church intuitively put this article of belief within the context of belief in God as the creator of heaven and earth. Both articles of belief provide mutual clarification, just as in the Old Testament the originally independent traditions of covenant and creation already influenced and enriched each other, resulting in refinement, correction and mutual reinforcement.[83]

Christian belief in creation implies that God loves us unconditionally, without limits: boundlessly, without merit on our part, and without qualification. Creation is an act of God which, on the one hand, unconditionally gives us our own particular character – finite, not divine, and destined for true humanity. Simultaneously, on the other hand, creation is an act in which God presents himself in selfless love as our God: our salvation and happiness, the supreme content of what it means to be true and good humanly. God creates men and women freely for the salvation and happiness of man himself; however, in the very same act, with the same sovereign freedom, he wills himself to be the deepest meaning of human life, its salvation and happiness. He is a God of mankind, our God, the creator. This is the Christian belief in creation. But how?

How this is so has to emerge from a history shaped by men, for better or for worse. Belief in creation means that God's nature reveals itself. In other words, who God is, the way in which God is really God, is not conditioned or determined, but is revealed in and through the whole of our history. Christians call God 'Lord' in the light of this history of the world. On God's part, to dare to create mankind and call it into being is a vote of confidence in mankind and our history, without any conditions or guarantees being offered from the side of man. Creation is a blank cheque for which God himself and God alone stands surety. It is a vote of confidence which gives those who believe in God the creator the courage to believe in word and in deed that, despite many experiences to the contrary, the kingdom of God, i.e. human salvation and
[127] happiness, is in fact in the process of being realized for mankind by the power of God's creation, which calls on man to realize it. God's battle against all the powers of chaos and alienation will be victorious. In their belief in creation, Christians bear witness to their belief that God's innermost being, in total freedom, is one of love for mankind and human deliverance: happiness, salvation, even enjoyment for men and women. As a result, the one who is trustworthy in all his freedom is a constant surprise for mankind: 'He who is and was and is to come' (Rev. 1.8; 4.8). By virtue of its eternal and absolute

[83] That is why I usually speak of the 'Christian belief in creation' without separating the Christian and the philosophical aspects.

freedom, God's unchangeable being, unchangeable because it does not share in the nature of created beings, presents itself to finite humanity as permanently new. This newness can nonetheless be recognized on every occasion as the action of the selfsame God: 'Here he is again!' Because God's act of creation is his eternal, absolutely free being, his absoluteness or non-relativity is at the same time relational,[84] i.e. relating itself to his creation, mankind in the world, in an absolute freedom, not conditioned by anything. By creating, God takes the side of all his vulnerable creation. For anyone in the Jewish-Christian tradition who believes in the living God, man's cause is the cause of God himself, without that in any way diminishing human responsibility for our own history.

As a result, 'christology' – the second article of belief: salvation from God in Jesus – can only be understood as a specific way of making belief in creation more precise. It does make belief in creation more precise, gives it specific content, in terms of our human history and the historical appearance of Jesus of Nazareth in it. Thus, in Christian terms, belief in creation shows those who are non-divine or vulnerable that God's nature is liberating love in Jesus the Christ.

People evidently find it difficult to believe in a divine being which in utter freedom determines what and who and how 'it', 'he', 'she' (here human words fail completely!) really is. Nevertheless, this is what belief in creation is. We ourselves, in accordance with our own vision of life and our plans for it, can only determine who, what and how we want to be in a very limited degree, dependent on all kinds of conditions. And even then, to a large extent we still fall short. In contrast, God's being is utterly and precisely as God wills it to be, without any remainder. He determines freely what he wills to be, as God, for [128] himself and for us, not in arbitrary sovereignty, but in unconditional love. For those who oppose death, injustice and alienation, and dare to choose life, this Christian belief in creation offers a secure footing. 'God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him' (I John 4.8-9). According to the New Testament, the Word which, in the Old Testament, had already spoken above all of love, has become flesh in Jesus of Nazareth: incarnate love.

Therefore 'christology' is concentrated creation: belief in creation as God wills it to be. It is not a new divine plan for a creation which has gone wrong, which is the way in which some religions interpret particular human experiences; it is the supreme expression of God's eternally new being which we can perceive to some degree only from ongoing creation and its history. In

[84] I deliberately use the somewhat pedantic word 'relational' here to avoid the ambiguity of 'relative'. Relative is opposed to absolute, but that is not necessarily the case with the word 'relational'.

the creed, in which belief in creation is essentially bound up with belief in the person of Jesus as God's definitive salvation for men and women, we bear witness to our readiness to accept that we are loved 'for nothing' by a God who takes the side of humanity, unconditionally and without our deserving it, a God who stands up for the humanness and humanity of men and women. This is expressed most strongly in the words of St. Paul: 'He loved us when we were still sinners' (Rom. 5.8), or in Johannine theology: 'In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us' (I John 4.10).

Only through Christ do we begin to realize clearly that there is more to God than might otherwise have been expected. God, the creator, the one in whom we can trust, *is* liberating love for humanity, in a way which fulfills and transcends all human, personal, social and political expectations.

We can and even must ask why, for what sound reasons did people who call themselves Christians arrive at the conviction that it is God's nature to love mankind, and not, as was often said earlier, even in the older strata of the Old Testament, that he is a God who has arbitrary and sovereign control over human life and death. Christians have learned this through their experience of the life of Jesus: from his message and from the way in which he lived in conformity with that message, from the specific circumstances of his death, and finally from the apostolic witness to his resurrection from the dead.

[129]

(b) The foundation of belief in Jesus Christ

(i) The message and praxis of the kingdom of God

It is striking that there is no mention in the creed of the message and life-style of Jesus, which are the foundation of his death and resurrection (see below).

In the Bible, and above all in the New Testament, 'kingdom of God' is the expression used to indicate the nature of God – unconditional and liberating sovereign love – in so far as this makes itself felt and is revealed in the life of men and women who do God's will. It is enough to choose one text at random from the rich store of New Testament stories about Jesus' message and praxis, viz., Luke's account of the calling of Peter (Luke 5.1-11). In it we hear of two boats drawn up on the shore and a number of fishermen who are mending their nets after an unsuccessful, indeed quite useless night of fishing. Jesus 'happens' to pass by. he simply gets into one of the two empty boats and says to a fisherman, Peter, 'Come on, we're going out on the lake.' Peter looks at this man, who is still a stranger, and without knowing precisely why, accepts his suggestion: he gets into the boat with Jesus. The others follow. Then Jesus begins to talk about a mysterious kingdom which nonetheless seems to be something quite definite, 'the kingdom of God', a kingdom for poor fishermen, joy for those who weep, satisfaction for those who are hungry. Suddenly he

changes the topic again and says, 'Let's go out into deeper water, and then we will catch big fish.' And indeed, a short while later there are so many fish that the nets seem likely to break. After what Peter had just heard about the coming kingdom of God, especially for the poor, for fishermen with empty nets, Peter felt the approaching nearness of God, and said in great anxiety, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man'. To perceive God in their everyday lives seems to make people anxious, just as small birds are terrified at the approach of the great eagle which is going to devour them. But Jesus says, 'Do not be afraid.' And the story goes on, 'They brought their boat to shore, left everything and followed him.' The text runs, 'Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people.' For Peter however, this was not the heart of the matter at that moment. It did not have to do with his one day becoming a great apostle; the important thing for Peter at that moment was Jesus' reassuring remark, 'Do not be afraid.'

[130] People's deepest feelings do, in fact, make them expect the most grotesque things from their God. They expect that if they were to give themselves to God completely and to concern themselves only with God's cause, nothing would be left but God, the great eagle who swallows up all the smaller birds, and that they would, therefore, have to do without themselves and the whole marvelous world of God's creation. The fact that man's cause is God's cause, and vice versa, and that this is what Jesus means when he talks about the kingdom of God, transcends all our human expectations of God. People imagine God in a very different way from the way in which he sees himself and presents himself. 'Does not even the sparrow find a home? Does not the swallow have its own nest?' In that case, will the small birds fall victim to the Great Eagle? When men think of God in human terms it can indeed lead to bizarre ideas. At one time people offered human sacrifice to honour their God. Are things any different in our day? Does not a great deal of evil and suffering come about in our world in the name of God? But Jesus says, 'Do not be afraid'; do not be afraid when you feel God approaching. God is a God of man, a God who, as Leviticus says, 'abominates human sacrifices' (Lev. 18.21-30; 20.1-5). God is indeed a fire, but a fire which does not consume the burning bush but leaves it intact. God's honour lies in human happiness.

The full content of this human salvation and happiness – the kingdom of God – transcends the power of our human imagination. We only get a faint idea of it, on the one hand, through human experiences of goodness, meaning and love; and on the other, as reflected in situations in which, whether as individuals or societies, we experience a threat to what is human in us, finding it oppressed and degraded in such a way that we rebel against it. However, these experiences only stand out properly against the background of Jesus' life, the way in which he went about Palestine 'doing good'. Here we have an

expressive form of the vision of what the kingdom of God can be. The New Testament has recorded this in one of its earliest recollections, when it says that, with Jesus, the kingdom of God approaches us (Matt. 12.28; Luke 11.20; see Matt. 3.2; 4.17; 10.7; Mark 1.15). The kingdom of God is a new relationship of mankind to God, and the visible tangible side of it is a new type of liberating
[131] mutual relationship between human beings themselves, within a peaceful, reconciling society. The wolf and the lamb lie down together, and the child plays by the snake's hole. To believe in this at its deepest, i.e. to believe in Jesus as the Christ, means to confess and actually to recognize that Jesus has a permanent and constitutive significance in the imminent approach of the kingdom of God, and thus in the all-embracing healing of men and women and making them whole. Our Christian creed is essentially concerned with Jesus' own unique relationship to the coming kingdom of God as salvation for mankind. 'I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man will also acknowledge as his own before God's angels' (i.e. at the last judgment)': this is the way in which the New Testament translates Jesus' own understanding of himself (Luke 12.8f. = Matt. 10.32f.; see also Mark 3.28f.; Matt. 12.32; Luke 12.10). For believers, the person of Jesus has worldwide historical significance. It is a fundamental Christian conviction that, with the coming of Jesus, 'God brushes up against us', so it has to be expressed in the creed in some way or other.

Of course we must remember here that (given the existence of the Jewish Yahwistic tradition) Jesus did not so much introduce a new doctrine of God; rather, he had a particularly sharp prophetic eye for the way in which this concept of God functioned in the society of his time, to the detriment of those who were already of no account. Jesus unmasked a concept of God which enslaves people; he fought for a view of God as a God who liberates mankind, a view which has to be expressed in specific actions. As a result, in the Christian gospel both 'God' and 'Jesus' take on a critical and productive, liberating force of their own. A religion which in fact serves to dehumanize people, in whatever way, is either a false religion or a religion which has a mistaken understanding of itself. This criterion of 'humanizing' which Jesus proclaimed, a passion for the humanity of mankind, for its totality and wholeness, is not a reduction of religion, as Jesus' opponents feared (both then and now). It is the primary condition for human possibility and religion's credibility. Furthermore, it is the only logical conclusion from the Christian vision of the nature of God, confessed as love. Jesus Christ is the 'great symbol' of this God and no other, the 'image of the invisible God' (Col. 1.15; see II Cor.
[132] 4.3f.). Here Jesus is at the same time the image of what a human being really needs to be as well, a picture of true and good humanity. The fact that believers knew themselves to be confronted uniquely by God himself in Jesus,

in some way or other, was expressed in the creed by the confession, 'I believe in Jesus: God's only Son'. For in Jesus we are not just confronted with God; in Jesus we are also addressed by God: in Jesus God confronts us with his own being. Jesus is therefore 'the word of God', i.e. not only the interpreter of humanity, someone who shows in word and deed what it can mean to be a truly human being, but at the same time the interpreter or exegete of God, someone who shows us in word and deed who and how God himself is. From the life of Jesus, Christians learn to give stammering utterance to the content of what 'God' is and the content of what 'man' is. Within the context of their own, different questions of a later period of time, the fathers of the Council of Chalcedon had the same concern as the authors of the Apostles' Creed when they said that one and the same Jesus Christ is truly human and truly God. Salvation from God in Jesus. The spirit in which we prayerfully use the creed is not that of cramped orthodoxy, but the spirit of the gospel: 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief' (Mark 9.23).

(ii) Crucified, died and was buried under Pontius Pilate

Death is an inevitable element in anyone's life, even in Jesus' life. Death, however, acquires a special significance when it is a premature death; and even more so when, as was the case with Jesus, it is an execution: not a spontaneous lynching party by a people who have been outraged beyond endurance, but an execution by authorities, in particular, by an occupying power. This is not a peripheral accident in the life of Jesus, much less a sheer historical misunderstanding, which is often said to be the case with the executions of champions of greater humanity. For the religious ruling class of the Jews, Jesus' message of the kingdom of God was a prophetic accusation, and for the Roman occupying forces, it was implicitly yet quite clearly a fatal condemnation: 'Jesus said, You know that the kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you' (Luke 22.25), and Matthew puts it even more sharply: 'Jesus said, You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you' (Matt. 20.25f.). The message of the kingdom of God, of a God concerned for mankind, [133] can in fact mobilize the masses to rebel, as we can see today, for example, in Latin America. Crucifixion, the Roman form of execution for not only criminals but also men who represented a political danger (by protesting against injustice), is the great historical testimony that the message of Jesus actually had a politically dangerous side, as it still does for religious and political authorities and for anyone who is not concerned with the real salvation of all men and women. The kingdom of God runs counter to any kingdom which can establish itself or remain in existence only by enslaving people, by keeping

them poor or even by torturing them. 'He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.' This last phrase was not added without a reason. Within the creed it is a historically dangerous recollection. Therefore we must judge Jesus' death from his message and his way of life, and only afterwards in the light of his resurrection as well. Otherwise the formula of belief, 'he died for our sins', would be an incomprehensible and incredible statement for contemporary people. It is precisely when Jesus' message and conduct, which led to his death, are ignored that the saving significance of this death is obscured. Jesus' death is the intrinsic historical consequence of the radicalism of both his message and his way of life, which demonstrated that all master-servant relationships are incompatible with the kingdom of God. The death of Jesus is the historical expression of the unconditional character of his proclamation and praxis, before which the fatal consequences for his own life faded completely into the background. The death of Jesus was a suffering through and for others as the unconditional endorsement of a practice of doing good and opposing evil and suffering. Therefore the life and death of Jesus must be seen as a single whole. Furthermore it was not God, 'who abominates human sacrifices', who brought Jesus to the cross. Men did that, removing him from the scene because they felt he was a threat to their status. Although God always comes 'in power', divine power knows nothing of the use of *force,* even against people who want to crucify his Christ. However, the human misuse of power does nothing to restrain God. The kingdom of God will indeed come, despite the human misuse of power and mankind's rejection of the kingdom of God.

[134] Thus the death of Jesus may never be interpreted in such a way that it does away with the 'for nothing', the unconditional nature of the love of God, manifested in Jesus. Reconciliation can never mean that God suddenly ignores his unconditional love and has to see 'the blood' of his Son flow before he will accept us in love! He already loved us when we were still sinners. We must therefore see that in one respect (the human misuse of power) the death of Jesus was a fiasco. The fact that, from a human point of view, this failure was a real aspect of the death of Jesus becomes obvious when we listen to the initial doubts: can this suffering and humiliated man be 'the Christ'? Initially, Jesus' suffering and death obscured the growing insight of the disciples into the essential link between 'Jesus' and 'Christ'. From this it follows that it is impossible for us to clarify the full identity of Jesus exclusively from his message and praxis. Many things happen to a person as well, and these contribute to his or her identity, precisely through the way in which one either integrates such events or does not know what to make of them. Therefore the identity of Jesus, his revelation of the way in which God is God as well as of the nature of true humanity, is incomplete unless we take into account his death and resurrection. Jesus maintained his radical dedication to both God

and humanity, even to the point of death, despite the fact that men executed him. The strength of God's love for mankind and of human love for God can also be clearly shown in earthly powerlessness, and perhaps this is why it is still the most disarming, namely reconciling. This also shows that salvation from God never means that God delivers us from our finitude. He is 'with us' in all that this finitude may specifically involve, both in positive experiences and in failure, suffering and death. The boundary between God and creation is, after all, our border line, not his. Consequently, the death of Jesus is not the last word about Jesus.

(iii) Risen from the dead

1. Just as the death of Jesus cannot be separated from his life, neither can his resurrection be separated from his life and death. First of all, I have to point out that Christian resurrection belief is in fact a first evaluation, in gospel terms, of the life and crucifixion of Jesus, in particular, the recognition of the intrinsic and irrevocable significance of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of [135] God and of his praxis in accordance with that kingdom, which nothing can take away. If we leave out this aspect of it, we empty belief in the resurrection of all meaning. But belief involves much more, and this 'much more' also has an intrinsic connection with Jesus' life and death. Firstly, the resurrection of Jesus is the breakthrough or manifestation of something that was already present in his death and life, namely his communion with God, which could not be broken by means of death. This living communion bears within itself the germ of resurrection: *vita mutatur, non tollitur.* In addition, however, the resurrection also has a corrective aspect: it is not merely the prolongation of Jesus' living communion with God (beyond death); it is the inauguration of the kingdom of God, the exaltation and glorification of Jesus: 'I believe in Jesus, the Lord'. That is to say, from God's presence, Jesus lives among his own people in his community. Therefore the resurrection, effected in the person of Jesus, is at the same time the gift of God's spirit to us. We cannot separate one aspect from the other, because if we do, we make Jesus' resurrection disappear into an inaccessible realm about which we cannot make any meaningful statements. We owe the fact that we can make some meaningful statements about it to the eschatological gift of the Spirit, sent to us from God by the living Jesus. Therefore 'kingdom of God' has a bilateral meaning: living-with-God as well as living in the kingdom of love and righteousness, the beginnings of which can already be seen in our history. For this reason the resurrection cannot be exclusively interpreted as God's authentication of the message of Jesus and its abiding value. This is merely one aspect of the resurrection. Furthermore, belief in the resurrection is essentially connected with belief in the permanent and essential significance of the person of Jesus himself in the coming of the

kingdom of God. God does not simply confirm visions and ideals. God is a God of men and therefore he identifies himself with the person of Jesus, just as Jesus identified himself with God: 'God is love'.

The creed stresses the death and resurrection of Jesus and is ultimately silent about his message and praxis. But we must not forget that the creed is a kind
[136] of succinct summary of Christian belief: Jesus' death and resurrection are in fact a *résumé* of his message and life's praxis. However, it is only clear why this is so when we look carefully at Jesus' message and life-style within the New Testament. At the time they were written, the four gospels were a reaction against tendencies to derive the whole of the Christian creed from the death and resurrection of Jesus, focusing exclusively on them. Anyone who does this runs the risk himself of incurring the criticism expressed in the message of the Jesus who was concerned about humanity. Political dictatorships led by so-called Christians who celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus on Sundays would be inconceivable if these authorities were aware of the fact that the death and resurrection of Jesus are founded on Jesus' message and praxis, on Jesus' praxis of the kingdom of God as the kingdom of a God who is concerned about men. Otherwise 'orthodoxy' becomes a mockery of the gospel as well as of Christianity.

2. There is still another element in the article of faith which concerns the death and resurrection of Jesus: 'he descended into hell'. Logically speaking, that really should have been discussed before the resurrection. However, I am only discussing it at this point and, in doing so, I am following the historical development of the creed, naturally. The phrase 'he descended into hell' was inserted into the creed in the fourth century, between 'suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried' and 'the third day he rose again from the dead'.

For the Old Testament, 'descent into hell' (= *sheol*, the underworld; not *gehenna* or hell) was a realistic expression for real death: the person who died descended into the kingdom of the dead (which was located in the underworld). Therefore to descend into hell simply meant to be really dead. However, in the polemics of Christian antiquity, the story that Jesus had not died on the cross continued to be re-told; thanks to his vigorous health he had survived his struggle with death. Christians were said to have called this survival 'resurrection'. Others said that since Jesus was God, his humanity and thus also his death were only apparent (docetism); in this way, they wanted to spare Jesus all the negative aspects of death. 'Descended into hell' was inserted into the creed to counteract views of this kind as well . In solidarity with our
[137] humanity, Jesus really did share in the negation that is our death, death itself. 'In all things like us.' (Heb. 4.15). The consequence of this is certainly that Jesus 'no longer is'. Like all those who have died, he has empirically vanished from

our history, for good. The time of his visible presence among us has passed forever. We may not make light of this aspect of the absence of Jesus. This means Christians stand 'defenseless' in the face of those who mock them, saying, 'Your Jesus is dead, just as every mortal person will be dead one day.' For this very reason, the death of Jesus was primarily the end of his trusting disciples' hopes: 'We had hoped' (Luke 24.13-35, the Emmaus story).

For a long time the Old Testament considered being dead an exclusion, not only from all human society, but also from God and his salvation. Only in *sheol* was God a stranger: the dead are dead. However, in the time of Jesus different views were already appearing. As a result of many experiences, Jewish spirituality had come to understand that living communion with God cannot be broken off, even through death. The presence of God extends even into Sheol. 'Love is stronger than death.' So the New Testament gives no grounds whatsoever for connecting the descent into hell with being 'rejected by God'. However, this does not do away with the fact that death, above all the death of an 'outcast' executed by his fellow men, was a tragic event for Jesus. Ultimately, however, the Gospel of John gives a correct interpretation of this painful situation when it has Jesus say, 'The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me' (John 16.32). Real hell consists in losing God along with all human company. That did not happen with Jesus, although God was silent. For Jesus, this divine silence was also a revelation of God. That is why, for all the pain, Jesus commended his life and death into the hands of his Father.

There is still more. In the New Testament we find at least one text, I Peter 3.18-22 and 4.6, in which the fact of Jesus' being dead, expressed as his descent (into hell), though not described as a 'triumphal entrance' (which is how some church fathers present it), is nonetheless seen as a last chance of salvation for all those who have died, thanks to Jesus' 'presence in the realm of the dead' (though here the New Testament bows before the mystery and does not say how the dead react to this last chance for salvation).[85] In any case, by mentioning the 'descent into hell' the Christian creed means to say that the [138] death of Jesus has a universal significance, for the living and for the dead. Jesus is the hope, not only for the living and for the generations to come, but even for those who have been written out of our history: for those who are already dead, for people who no longer have any future in terms of our earthly order; for those who are completely excluded — even for people who never knew Jesus. Seen in the light of the resurrection, belief in the 'descent into hell' is the expression of the Christian belief (however early its formulation) that, in Jesus, God gives a future even to those who know no future. This is the extreme

[85] See II, 229-234.

consequence of Jesus' message of the unconditional love of a God who is concerned with the future of all mankind, 'the kingdom of God'. This aspect of our faith once again underlines God's preference for those who have been 'put out of action' and made of no account. Leaving aside the manner in which it is presented, the 'descent into hell' is not folklore or a myth that needs to be demythologized, but rather one of the most compassionate points of the whole Christian creed: God wants the salvation of all mankind.

Therefore resurrection is not just the basis for the future, but it is also reconciliation with the past. Salvation concerns not only the future but also the broken past. No earthly ideology can rival Christianity here. For God, no human being is a reject. (What the modern age calls 'human rights' is a weak, though authentic, secular residue of this Christian view.)

To conclude: to take sides with men and women in distress is to follow God himself, God as he has shown himself in his deepest involvement with humanity in Jesus. 'He showed love to us while we Christians were still in wretchedness'. God's concern for men becomes the criterion – i.e. the measuring rod, and at the same time the boundless measure – of our concern for our fellow men and women who are needy and oppressed. This boundless sensitivity to human needs develops to the full only when it proceeds from a personal experience of God's gracious 'yes' to all men. God says to us, 'You may live; you may be' – as an expression of the nature of God, 'God is love'. Theologians call this 'justification by grace alone', a learned way of talking about God's love for man. This divine boundlessness is not all that obvious to us men: it goes beyond what we tend to call 'co-humanity,' but is obvious to all
[139] who themselves have experienced God's mercy, in other words, to believers, to Christians. It is also the test of the authenticity of our prayer, our liturgy and our eucharist, which properly celebrates Jesus and praises him as Lord. However, one of the gospels also says that it is not enough for us to cry out 'Lord, Lord'. Our way of life must give a concrete indication of our belief in Jesus as 'the Lord'. According to all kinds of apocrypha (non-biblical Christian writings from antiquity) even angels found God's predilection for man a stumbling block. Ultimately Jesus, whom we may call God's only beloved Son, is also a human being just like you or me – except that he is even more human.

Epilogue

IN YOUR VIEW, IS JESUS STILL GOD? YES OR NO?

After all that has been said, I really find this question superfluous, and only comprehensible from the perspective of those of little faith or misplaced anxiety for orthodoxy. But let us take this anxiety seriously as well.

Within the step-by-step exposition of the experience of salvation in Jesus, directed towards an explicit christology, this question is indeed posed too early. But a theologian is ultimately a believer in all his christological projects, otherwise his project itself would already become meaningless; he is in search of what he can and may really believe now, while he believes as a Christian thanks to the historical mediation of what I have always called 'the great Christian tradition'. Here I can only make explicit what, for the unbiased reader, all too clearly is the real tenor of my two Jesus books.

First of all, then, let me say that this can be a wrongly formulated question. Naturally it is true that Jesus' message becomes incomprehensible if its hearers do not have a certain concept of what and who God is in advance. The Jews who came into contact with Jesus and 'began to follow him' also had a prior understanding of what 'God' means. But according to the four gospels, in which a kerygmatic history of Jesus is narrated, the whole significance of the man Jesus – for the Jews, a fellow member of the same religion – lay in the fact that, through his appearance as a man among fellow men, he has shown in a special way who and what and how God is, as salvation for men and women, and indeed in the line of what I would now like to call 'the great Jewish religious tradition'. The New Testament ultimately is not concerned with the application of a foreign concept of God onto what happened in Jesus, but with the new view of God that was given in and through Jesus in the context of the great Jewish tradition of Yahweh – as insight into God.[86] But what Jesus did so [141]
that others began to experience definitive salvation in him, salvation from God, ultimately does raise the question: who is he, that he has the authority to do

[86] See, among others, L. Dequeker, 'Le dialogue judéo-chrétien: un défi à la théologie', *Bijdragen* 37, 1976, 2-35.

such things? If he passes on to us a new relationship towards God and his kingdom, then it is obvious that one asks: What is *his* relationship to this God and – via the answer to this question – what is God's relationship to him? In this sense, the question posed is not only legitimate but also necessary, seen from the perspective of the 'phenomenon Jesus' himself.

From this it becomes clear that Jesus in his humanity is 'given a name', i.e. becomes specified through his relationship to God. Said in another way: Jesus' deepest being lies in his personal connection with God (moreover, this is connected with the concept 'eschatological prophet' who speaks with God 'mouth to mouth', 'face to face', 'as with a friend'). Our creaturely relationship with God is undoubtedly also essential for the 'being human' common to all of us. But this relationship does not specify our being man or woman in our humanity. It says only that men are creatures. Nothing – no creature – escapes this relationship, but that is not to say anything about the proper nature of this creature. With Jesus there is more. It is already apparent from the New Testament that, on the one hand, God can only be 'defined' from and in terms of the human life of Jesus, and on the other hand, that as a man in his full humanity Jesus can only be defined in terms of his unique relationship with God and man (this, too, was a well-known aspect of the eschatological prophet). According to the New Testament, God does indeed, in a very special and unprecedented way, belong to the definition of what and who the man Jesus is.

God, however, is greater than even his supreme, conclusive and definitive self-revelation in the man Jesus ('the Father is greater than I', John 14.28). Jesus' being human points therefore essentially towards God and towards the coming of God's kingdom, for which he himself had sacrificed his life, that is, 'thought it to be of less value'. For Jesus, God's cause – the kingdom of God, as salvation for man – was thus greater than the concern for his own life. No theology may minimalize this fact by means of a direct appeal to what could be called a human attack on God himself. Although people attacked Jesus and are
[142] guilty before God in this, Jesus himself nonetheless esteemed his life of less value than that for which he stood: the coming of God's kingdom as salvation of and for man – consequently less than God. In this self-effacing pointing to God, whom Jesus called his creator and father, lies his definition, that is his actual significance. For this reason, according to Christian faith, Jesus is both (a) the conclusive and definitive revelation of God; and (b) at the same time he shows us what and how we ultimately can and in fact ought to be human. The glory of God is visible in the face of Jesus the Christ, just as this same appearance of Jesus reveals what a human being ought to be. This is the interpretation of Christian faith. From this it is apparent that the transcendence of God cannot be separated from his immanence or his being with us. God's

being is absolute freedom: his being freely determines how he as a being will be for us, and that is – seen from the perspective of our history in which Jesus has appeared, for we do not have another angle from which to view it – salvation for man in Jesus within a greater history of salvation, which embraces creation from beginning to end. We cannot separate God's being from his revelation. For this reason, the man Jesus, in the definition of what he is, does indeed have something to do with the being of God.

I do not yet know whether we can, have to or may theoretically specify this even more precisely. I am sometimes hesitant to want to delineate the mystery of a person, especially of the person of Jesus, in every detail.[87] When people have more to say than they can rationally express in words, they begin to tell stories and parables instead. Symbolic evocation transcends the impotence of conceptual articulation. No christological agnosticism is intended here. But delineation *(horismos* or definition) is also delimiting, and with this delineation you therefore do run the risk of underrating the mystery, of distorting it: whether by understating it (Arianism, Nestorianism) or by overstating it (Monophysitism), or by moving in the direction of a timeless and pure paradox[88] and, in so doing, detaching the once historical Jesus of Nazareth who lived among us from his historical and temporal appearance as a man among his fellow men.

In Jesus God reveals his own being by willing to be salvation for humanity. That is why I emphasize two facets in my two Jesus books: 1. the salvation of mankind lies in the living God *(vita hominis, visio Dei),* and 2. God's honour lies in our happiness and liberation, salvation and wholeness *(Gloria Dei, vivens homo;* see I, 605; II, 647: the title and what follows). In the man Jesus, the revelation of the divine and the disclosure of the true, good and really happy way of being human – as ultimately the supreme possibility of human life – perfectly coincide in one and the same person. This abundantly justifies the [143]

[87] I said above that in every experience one must make a distinction (which can never be carried through adequately) between the element of experience and the element of interpretation, and how a further elaboration of this experience must proceed from both aspects. But nonetheless, because there is a certain distinction (however inadequate), the immanent development of the moment of interpretation can indeed begin to lead a life of its own without any connection back to the experience, as a consequence of problems which that interpretive model already of itself evokes. So I am of the opinion that specific problems have indeed come into existence throughout the entire theological history of christology which are only intrinsic consequences of the interpretive model being used; in the long run, such a (purely immanent) development from a single model often results in insoluble impasses. All further refinements of the model are then no longer of any help, and it is high time to look for a new model from the perspective of the original experience, and to at least listen once again to the original story. In other words, a speculative christology has limits, and must give way to religious symbolic evocation.

[88] In my opinion, what J. B. Metz rightly calls the 'memorative narrative of soteriology' *(Glaube in Geschichte,* op. cit. 119) also must produce after-effects in a systematic christology, – a problem with which Metz, as a fundamental theologian, does not explicitly concern himself, whereas it is here that the actual difficulties begin.

Christian tradition of Christ mysticism. This liturgical mysticism found an appriopriate expression – even though coloured by the conceptuality of late antiquity – in Nicaea and Chalcedon.